



## LIVE BY THE CREED

I WILL SEEK VENGEANCE UPON THOSE WHO HAVE BETRAYED MY FAMILY, ONLY TO UNCOVER A CONSPIRACY BIGGER THAN I COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

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I AM AN ASSASSIN

# ASSASSIN'S



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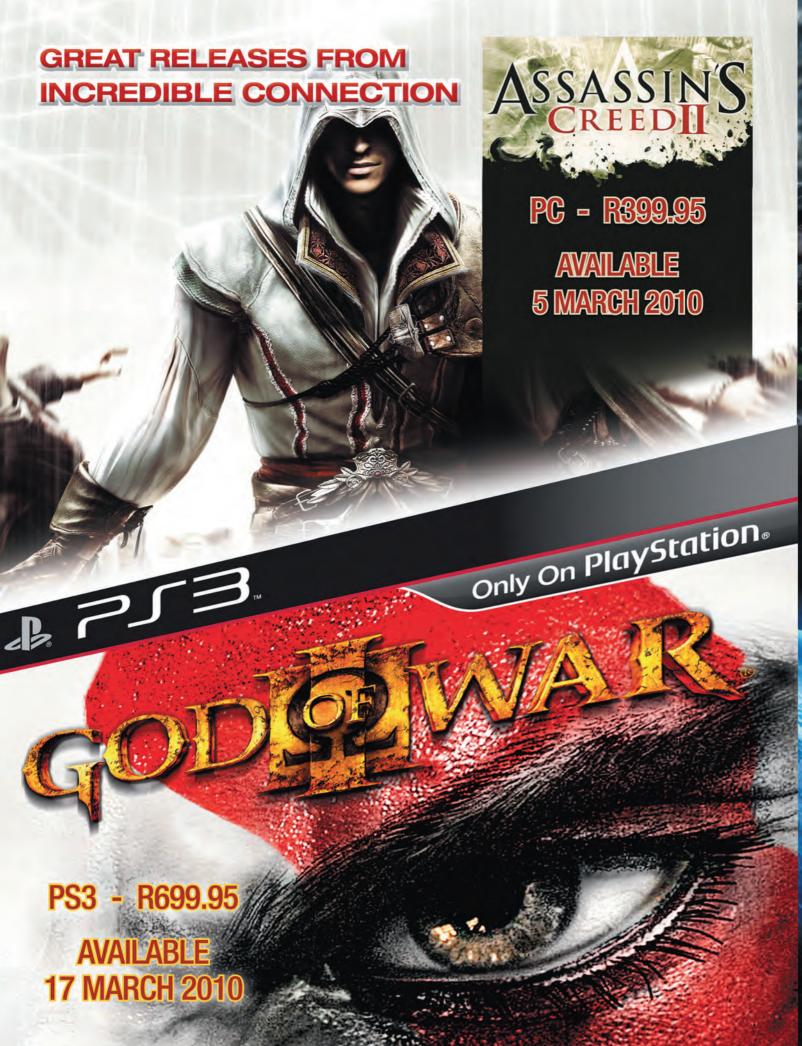
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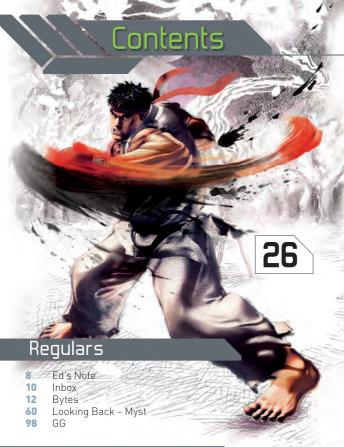












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Cyber-Wing | Dark Void | L!ght Deluxe | Serious Sam Forever Multiplayer | Wings of Prey | Zombie Driver | Zombillution

#### **GRAPHICS DRIVERS**

ATI Catalyst Drivers 10.1 Vista & XP | NVIDIA Forceware 196.21 WHQL Vista & XP

BattleCraft - Updated v2.0 BF1942 Editor | Battlefield Heroes Theme | Benchmarking Software | CheatBook Database 2010 + Update | Game State for NAG | Gamemaker 8 Gamer Girls | GENETOS | Half-Life 2D Game | L4D - Dead Before Dawn Campaign Map TUT3 MAP CTF Safeguard 3 | Winamp Media Player 5.57 | Windows Essentials Codec Pack | YouDunnit

#### PATCHES

Avatar: The Game Patch v1.02 | Borderlands Patch v1.21 (Retail) | Call of Duty: World at War - Patch v1.7

#### **GAME TRAILERS**

1 vs 100 - Avatar Dance Contest Winner | Ace Attorney Investigations Miles Edgeworth | After Burner Climax - Debut Trailer | Alter Ego - Debut Trailer | Armored Core Last Raven - PSP Debut Trailer | Army of Two The 40th Day - Co-op Demo Trailer Battlefield Bad Company 2 - PC Beta Trailer | Battlefield Bad Company 2 - Single-Player Reveal Trailer | Battlefield Bad Company 2 - Xbox 360 Demo Trailer Part 1 | Battlefield Bad Company 2 - Xbox 360 Demo Trailer Part 2 | Battlefield Heroes -Vampires vs. Werewolves Trailer | Bayonetta - Launch Trailer | BioShock 2 - Advanced Multiplayer Mayhem Trailer | BioShock 2 - Big Daddy Bash Multiplayer | BioShock 2 - Launch Trailer | BioShock 2 - Official Special Edition Unboxing | Bittos - PC Launch Trailer | Blur - Under the Hood II - Progression Documentary | Brink - Character Customisation Walkthrough | Castlevania The Adventure Rebirth - Stage IV Trailer Cho Aniki O Muscle Brothers - Debut Trailer | Chronos Twins - Debut Trailer | Chronos Twins DX - Stage 1 Dual Trailer | Command & Conquer 4 Tiberian Twilight - Class Warfare | Dante's Inferno - Minions of Hell Trailer | Darwinia+ - Debut Trailer | Death by Cube - Base Defense Trailer | Digimon Story Lost Evolution - Japanese Debut Trailer | Distant Worlds - Debut Trailer

Divinity II Ego Draconis - Enemies of Rivellon Trailer | Divinity II Ego Draconis - Launch Trailer | Dragon Age Origins Awakening - Debut | Dragon Age Origins Awakening - Queen of the Black Marsh | Front Mission Evolved - World of Tomorrow Trailer | Galcon Fusion - Debut Trailer | God Eater - Japanese Overview Trailer | Heavy Rain - Mall Trailer | Hypno - Launch Trailer | Infinite Space - Cinematic Trailer | Iron Roses - Debut Trailer | Jailbreak Source - Launch Trailer | Lost Planet 2 - Gears of War Trailer MAG - Killstreak Trailer | MAG - Launch Trailer | MAG - Team Fail Trailer | Majesty 2 Kingmaker - Debut Trailer | Mass Effect 2 - Launch Trailer | Mass Effect 2 - Miranda Narrative Trailer | Mass Effect 2 - Shepard Narrative Trailer | Mass Effect 2 - Subject Zero Narrative Trailer | Mass Effect 2 - Zaeed Massani DLC Trailer | Mega Man Zero Collection - Japanese Debut Trailer | Metro 2033 - Journey Into The Unknown Trailer Monday Night Combat - Debut Trailer | Muscle March - Endless Rush Trailer | Naughty Bear - Debut Trailer | No More Heroes 2 Desperate Struggle - Launch Trailer | Pack-Attack! - Episode 1 - Premiere | Paradise Quest - Debut Trailer | Project Natal - CES 10 - Research Documentary | R.U.S.E. - Making Of Documentary | Ragnarok Online DS - Classes Trailer | Shiren The Wanderer - Face the Bosses Trailer | Shiren The Wanderer - Story Walkthrough | Skate 3 - Black Box Skate Park Trailer | Skate 3 - Port Carverton Downtown Producer | Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing - Game Features Trailer | Space Ark - Launch Trailer | Spec Ops The Line - Evolution of War Interview | Splinter Cell Conviction - CES 10 - Co-op & Deniable Ops Interview | Splinter Cell Conviction - Victor Coste Character Trailer | Split Second - Downtown Trailer | Star Trek Online - Cardassian Faction Trailer | Star Trek Online - Ground Combat Vignette | Super Street Fighter IV - Animated Juri Trailer | Super Street Fighter IV - Fight Club Tournament Highlights | Super Street Fighter IV - The Next Level Trailer | Supreme Commander 2 - 360 Interface Walkthrough Part 1 | Supreme Commander 2 - 360 Interface Walkthrough Part 2 | Supreme Commander 2 - Battle Part 1 | Supreme Commander 2 - Battle Part 2 | Supreme Commander 2 - Gas Powered Games Office

Supreme Commander 2 - Innovation Interview | Tatsunoko vs. Capcom Ultimate All-Stars - Frank West vs Ryu Trailer | The Saboteur Mobile - Debut Trailer | The Secret World - Kingsmouth Location Teaser | Transformers War for Cybertron - One Shall Stand Trailer | Trauma Team - Endoscopy Walkthrough | Victoria II - Debut Dev Diary VVVVVV - Topsy Turvy Trailer | White Knight Chronicles - Combat System Walkthrough | White Knight Chronicles - Plains Skimmer Gameplay Trailer | White Knight Chronicles - The Online Experience Featurette | Your Doodles Are Bugged! - Debut

#### **SCREWATTACK 7**

Abodox | BattleTanx | Ecco The Tides of Time | Future Cop LAPD | Math Blaster | Super Mario Land 3 Wario Land | Zero Wing

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T'S JUST BEEN ONE of those months out in the wild.
It's a fail month, all around – no exception. We even sucked at Modern Warfare 2 this month? The good news is that we've been laughing our way through it either that or fall asleep weeping into our tear soaked pillows. The good part is that it can't possibly get this terrible all in one go ever again, right? So, we're happy to have seen the gaming magazine equivalent of Armageddon come and go and live through it. Win!

Here's the list of Fail for the month of February 2010...

Sand: Well. People sent us pictures: demanded to know why/who/where/what; they were sad and disappointed; some laughed and laughed; a few said we are geniuses and others said we are idiots. The plan kind of worked well but in some cases, a certain percentage of the DVD sleeves weren't sealed up tightly, and out of that percentage some sand slipped behind the DVD, and out of that percentage some were stored at the bottom of piles of magazine, and out of that percentage some were jostled around, and out of those few some got scratched. Who knew? We should have seen it coming and rather put all the sand in a little sealed bag, but the idea of people going, 'damn! Sand...' and that just back from the beach sensation after our December holidays made us do it. See, I say 'us' all the time thereby not assigning blame - clever hey (okay it was me). If your DVD got damaged please contact us so we can replace it. The universe graced us with spare DVDs quite by accident last month. Needless to say, after all the excitement, emails and phones calls we have proved to the world that sand inside a magazine bag with a DVD isn't a good idea. Fail. ;) But we got huge publicity. Win!

The Cover: This was a bit of a problem too. The first plan was God of War 3 but we never got the Q&A back in time (or any proper code) despite the efforts of everyone involved (maybe next month guys...) Fail. The next option was Command & Conquer 4 but... two problems here: we've already run a C&C 4 cover and to my knowledge no game has ever featured twice on the *NAG* cover. The other problem was the artwork

The Games: Go and count the number of game reviews we have in this issue. okay I'll save you the trip - it's four. Four games - ridiculous right... ridiculous, but true There was a scramble to generate some preview content, and someone said there's so much cool stuff coming this year, and so we

ended up with a monster 10-page feature on upcoming coolness in 2010. No games released this month. Fail. Awesome epic feature. Win!

Reviews

Previews

CLAN challenges: We might seem like a bunch of friendly guys but the truth is... No, hang on, we are really nice - promise. A while ago, last month and this week I received a few challenges to play against a clan (it happens almost every week when I'm online). The answer is no. We play for fun. The last time we tried taking on a clan they beat us down like bitches with their superior l337 skills. We enjoyed the whole elimination event and even won a few rounds but overall we just don't have the time to spend practising that much - hats off to you guys. It's amazing how much dedication goes into being in a clan. Who knew? Fail. We won't have to go through that again. Win!

#### NOW FOR JUST SOME WIN...

Check page 7. We teamed up with the good people over at FNB to send two gamers to Germany with us to attend GamesCom. At least go and have a look at the competition and see if it grabs your fancy. They're also giving away R10,000 to the two winners.

That's about it, I'm so done with February 2010 you can't imagine - make sure to pick up our April issue it's our birthday issue and while I'm here, happy Year





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Tel: (021) 555 7136 Fax: (021) 555 7187 Tel: (031) 571 8839 Fax: (031) 571 8865 Port Elizabeth: Tel: (041) 398 7082 Fax: (041) 398 7135 Bloemfontein: Tel: (051) 430 0000 Fax: (051) 430 1144 All letters sent to NAG are printed more or less verbatim.

#### Letter of the Moment

FROM: Devin SUBJECT: Sand Argument...

11 HAVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO NAG and my mom was angry that the "post office" got sand all over the NAG... There I was, walking into the post office with my NAG in my hand and my mom preparing to blast the poor woman at the counter for getting sand all over it. The argument started with my mom screaming at the woman about the general "I couldn't care less" attitude that the post office has. At this point I started opening the plastic which protects NAG. The lady stammered and told my outraged mother it was not her fault but she would pass the complaint on. My mom continued, saying that it was her problem as she refuses to accept this in such a destroyed and tampered with manner. I was now finished with the first few pages and noticed the words, "Sand... That sh1t gets everywhere" printed on the Ed's Note page. I didn't want to ruin the fun just yet so I kept this to myself. The lady was stuttering trying to form a sentence and then got up and said she would call the manager. The manager arrived and before my mom could have an "all out battle" with the manager, I showed her the Ed's Note. Her face turned red and she stormed out the post office utterly embarrassed... damn that was fun to watch, I thought to myself. Anyway keep up the amazing work guys.'

Yeah, that sand thing is another whole story altogether. Oddly, us just dumping sand inside the magazine bag has generated more email, discussion and publicity than the whole of rAge 2009. It's really funny to think it all started when someone said, 'hey, wouldn't it be cool...' I thought it was a fun idea but didn't consider that some DVDs might end up scratched here and there. : (Fear not, we won't be trying that again in a hurry - the fallout is just too much to handle. ;) Ed.



The 'Letter of the Moment prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

#### **IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY** ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158 Cyber mail: letters@ tidemedia.co.za Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



FROM: Floors SUBJECT: I swear I'll jump! I'M 16 YEAR-OLD TEENAGER wanting

Inothing more than to win the letter of the moment prize. So what do most teenagers do when they can't get something important - threaten with kamikaze. So as I am speaking here I am currently climbing the tallest building I can find. Damn all these steps I'm getting all tired. So, I have reached the roof and I'm asking again - hand over the letter of the moment prize please. No? Right, then I'm jumping. Three... Two... One! Geronimo! SPLAT! Damn that stole my moment. I'm

still on the ledge here so please, and by the way awesome magazine!"

Jump, jump, jump! No! Wait, wait. Hang on, before you do that see if you can get someone else to buy your copy of NAG each month. We'd prefer it if your suicide didn't affect us at all. Ed

FROM: Rudolf **SUBJECT:** To be or Not to Be?

REALLY DON'T KNOW WHY I was thinking about this the other day, but it was kind of funny how this phrase is still used after all this time! I'm pretty sure everybody has heard of or knows this phrase somehow. It started out as a sentence in William Shakespeare's play called Hamlet in the 1600's, and after all this time it's still here! It's been quoted in movies, other stage performances and just the other day in a game! It wasn't really quoted, but mimed by Claptrap in Borderlands' menu. If you don't do anything at the menu he does really random stuff, but the one I'm talking about specifically is where he is standing with a skull and imitating the move of Hamlet (a guy talking to a skull). The point I'm making is that something like a quote is carried over for 400 years, and is still not forgotten. I'm just wondering what in the massive world of games is going to be remembered for so long and is gonna make an impression on somebody in maybe a 100 years? It's really something to think about."

In 100 years time everything we're doing today will be a short footnote in some 'networked' reference database. It's all so fleeting and the further you travel away from this point in time the less relevant everything becomes. I dare to guess that Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, James Cameron's Avatar and the death of Michael Jackson will be the only things that stand out in 2009. For me the technology and related 'culture' (gaming and otherwise) I experience today is like a spot on a river bank - there's no start or end to it - it just flows and occasionally something sticks out and we write about it and if enough people write about something it will be remembered for a short time. Ed.

FROM: Desmond

**SUBJECT:** Bringing Legends Back **11** LI EY GUYS, I KNOW this is going to appeal to a lot of guys born in the 1980's. Maybe even for the younger generation too. The other day I was flying Airwolf on MS Flight Simulator X, flying in the Grand Canyon at Mach 1.6. And I was thinking at that time that someone must revisit the story of Airwolf in a game - a FPS/Simulator game where you play as String Fellow Hawk. Solve cases and blow the enemy out of the sky. Come on guys, there is nothing like flying a bullet proof, supersonic, stealth helicopter that has 14 different weapon options and can fly at 100000 ft! Of course, I would like to see a new version of the following games too: Redneck Rampage, Shadow Warrior,

Duke 3D. Terminator Future Shock and Chuck Yeager's Air Combat! Those are classics!"

It's always good to see old-school gamers in active service. I remember play Airwolf on the Commodore 64 – it really sucked. I'm all for a remake as long as it's not a puzzle platform game. In the meantime, have a look at www.gog.com for some nostalgic gaming options. Ed

FROM: Gordon **SUBJECT:** None given CAN YOU HELP ME with Company of Heroes Please? How to get it up and running?"

Just double click on the game icon, wait for it to load and then look for something that says 'single player', 'start game', 'begin mission' or similar. After that you'll have to choose a level of difficulty to suit your general skill level, happy gaming. Ed

FROM: James **SUBJECT:** Piracy **INOTICED THAT YOU HATE** pirates. My ■question is, why? What's so bad about

We hate them because they suck donkey balls. Also, thanks for your list (deleted) of reasons why you think piracy is okay. Ed.

FROM: Heiko

SUBJECT: New Paper

**11** LII, LOVE THE MAGAZINE and have bought every issue in the past 5 years or so. I've always been fond of the quality paper and feel the magazine had, it seemed like it was just that much better than everything else out there. Although I understand you want to expand the magazine I don't like the new way the magazine is printed it just feels like some other old magazine now. Hope it goes back to the solid way it was before."

... Ed

FROM: Bryan SUBJECT: Look and Feel **OPE ALL IS WELL** in the land of NAG! I've just been reading the small

article you wrote about the look and feel

Written by Neil A Bate MISSION : RESCUE LOCATION : SECTOR 1 SCORE 000000 HI SCORE 000000

of this month's issue. It looks and feels great, probably better than previous months, and If it's saving you guys bucks on using this paper then go for it. I'll buy your magazine even if I have an epic allergic reaction to the paper and I turn into a monster from Dead Space 2 (looks great by the way). Anyway, keep the look. It's great!"

... Ed

FROM: John

SUBJECT: For the love of games, not hardware

I, MY NAME IS John, and I was just wondering if you guys would send me some expensive hardware for free... No, I'm just kidding, but as I was reading the December issue of NAG, I came across two letters [goes on a bit about how he can't believe people ask for free hardware, Ed]... So the reason I'm writing this letter is to score some awesome games [goes on a bit about what a big fan he is, Ed]... Final question, since everyone at NAG consists of Pure Military-Grade awesome, do you bleed when you're injured? And if so, what colour is your blood?"

We do not get injured and therefore do not bleed. However, if for some reason one of us cuts another by accident the stuff that comes out is so potent it dissolves diamonds instantly and contains thousands of army commandoes that fire nuclear missiles while riding killer whales armed with laser beams and sonic death rays. Ed

FROM: Kristen SUBJECT: Assassin 49

**I BEREI'M SITTING LISTENING** to Ladv Gaga while writing this letter. It seems like every time I try and win this letter of the moment I always get beaten by weaklings. So this month I'm winning this. ED HAND OVER THE GAMES OR YOU DIE (I'M A MASTER ASSASSIN BETTER THAN EZIO) ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SEND THE GOODS TO [actually gives an address, Ed] AND YOU AND YOU'RE FAMILY WON'T GET HURT. Don't try to run away I know where you work and is [LOL, Ed] constantly watching you. P.S NO HARD FEELINGS.

Sorry, no can do. Next time, if you're trying to intimidate someone via email rather use capital letters all the way through, don't end with 'no hard feelings' and make fewer grammatical errors, Ed.

#### SHORTS (EXTRACTS OF LOI FROM NAG READER LETTERS)

"I tried claiming a new February 2010 NAG DVD but my insurance does not cover sand damage. WARNING: May contain traces of sarcasm." - Wayne

"Oh yeah, one more thing, I just want to know, what were the costs involved to empty the Sahara?" - Eswee

#### NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork, incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



Igor Shnyp: "NAG is awesome, Modern Warfare 2 is awesome. What Photoshop skills are not that great."

"Please disregard the bad spelling and grammar in my previous mail..." - Mark

"You guys have the world's best magazine; I threw my bible away months ago and turned to the NAG for guidance." - Wezley

"If anyone disagrees I will go all zombie on his ass! (You know...if it didn't involve getting up from the couch) Anyway... gamers are here to stay, but this is what really bugs me: some people despise games. Why?" - Josh

"The postponement of the PC version of Assassin's Creed 2 and the difficulty of installing Modern Warfare 2 (internet problems) was like a piece of glass, being forced into my liver." - Koos

"I really don't know why. I looked deep in myself, I play games and I read your magazine, but I still don't know why physics makes me smile at a game. Before you look at me strangely let me tell you why..." - Regan

"Sorry I felt I just had to add this, Tarryn with your Back to the future column. What was with the first paragraph you should change your title from GG to Tarryn's Meanderings (Miktar yours isn't meanderings it's insightful) Tarryn it was just that first paragraph with all those metaphors and excellent play with words but doesn't have any purpose (you might say the same about this wouldn't you?(rhetorical question by the way) I guess that's one way to fill a paragraph though or show your supreme grasp of the English language, you can just dismiss this as a complaint from someone who didn't understand a word you said) apart from that the rest was good and nice borderlands review." - Luke

"I have a decent spec SLI rig which runs Crysis smoother than chocolate body paint running down the bronzed thigh of a supermodel in a sauna, which is an

TION: What would be the worst thing to get for free, inside a magazine bag?

dammit: Loose razor blades

Azimuth: Shit or vomit or a Counter-Strike demo disc. I can't

Chainsaw: Herpes

itBurnes: Flesh Eating Crabs or a Barney Movie!

brazed: Warm Diet soda.

Insomniac: Sand.

CaViE: Zombie titties?

Bonezmann: A Hannah Montana DVD \*shudders\*

ShadOwstr1k3: A brick.

NecroWolf: An invitation to Jacob Zuma's (next) wedding

H3R3T1C: Hello! Kitty ISLAND ADVENTURE STORIES AND a

Sir PaniCore: A 7 part DVD series on how to put Bricks to sleep.

SC(+)PE: Liquid, unconfined, entire-magazine-censoring ink.

Domanskip: A Krogan baby.

Graal: An Atari 2600 E.T. game cartridge.

MarryO+LewyG: A coupon for a discount on a copy of Duke

Fenn: A notice from NAG telling us it's their last issue.

**CrashHelmut:** Anthrax. The powdery substance, not the band.

wisp: Ectoplasm or a NAG staff members cheque (well at least that one would be good for a laugh)

pArkEr: A DVD that isn't really free.

zom813: A lithopedion.

cov1e\_stalker: KFC , having its all encompassing yet tasty

InsertName: A Nazi

DukeOFprunes: DEATH.

vii: A swift kick in the crotch..

eye-wateringly beautiful thing to behold (the Crysis graphics, I mean, though I'm sure the other would be too), but I bought an X-Box anyway since some games are console only." - Trevor

"If someone could just create crossplatform servers for FPS it would be proven by total ownage of console iunkies." - Andre



# In the pipeline

## Plenty of titles coming from EA over the next 12 months

WITH THE MYTHICAL Q1 2010 already off to a fantastic start in terms of releases, EA is making it quite clear that this is just the beginning of a long list full of big names and bigger sequels.

Details for Crysis 2 have finally emerged. It's already been announced that the game will be coming for both console and PC, which means that more than the dozen-or-so people with powerful-enough PCs will be able to play it as the developers intend on the day of release. That particular day is set to be during Q4 this year, by the way. The story will take place some three years after the first title, and promises to be deeper and more filled with surprises than that of Crysis. There's a new suit, imaginatively named Nanosuit 2, which boasts a tactics mode that lets players do a little recon before they go in guns blazing; they'll be able to scan the environment for enemy

positions and gather data from fallen troops. While the new suit will still have four modes, Power and Speed have been combined into one. The big news here is that Crysis 2 will take place in an urban environment, which lends itself better to vertical combat and tighter tactics by having more battle indoors.

The publisher has also announced the more-or-less release dates for a few other big titles. The Sims 3 is set to have a console port, which is due out towards Christmas. Dead Space 2 (which is now slated for release only on consoles) looks like it'll only ship sometime in early 2011, along with Dragon Age 2 - both titles will also make an appearance on as-yet unconfirmed handheld platforms. During this period, also look forward to another Sims game, a new Need for Speed and, a little surprisingly, something from the Spore box of tricks - there's a title we

weren't expecting to hear anything from for a while. Oh, and the muchanticipated Need for Speed World should be arriving sometime this year, between April and June.

Not the type to leave all the moder "warfare-ing" success to the Call of Duty franchise, EA has the July to September period pegged for the release of the next Medal of Honor. Oh, what's that? You weren't aware that MoH is gunning straight for  ${\it CoD}$  with its own modern take on combat? Well it is. The videos released so far look very similar to Modern Warfare, but it's too early to tell how things will turn out.



You like camo? I LOVE



## Don't mess with Nintendo

**WE ALL KNOW THAT** piracy is wrong. Chances are, however, that most of you have dabbled in a bit of file sharing or "demo usage" in your time, with maybe a bit of concern for the possible repercussions for what might happen if you get caught. A slap on the wrist is considered pretty standard for most home pirates who get bust for their dirty deeds, perhaps in the form of a few thousand dollars worth of fines or the like. This is not the case with Aussie pirate James Burt, who first uploaded a pirated copy of New Super Mario Bros. Wii to the Internet.

Using some pretty advanced technological forensics. Nintendo's legal team managed to track the man down and subsequently attempted to take him to court. Before it even got that far, however, the two parties settled privately to the tune of AUD\$1.5 million (that's just over R10 million) "to compensate Nintendo for the loss of sales revenue caused by the individual's

We're not sure what Burt's current financial position is, but even if he managed to wangle a yearly payment, he's still looking at coughing up around AUD\$200,000 per year for the rest of his life - not an easy task for almost anyone to accomplish.

#### Ghost Recon goes back to the future

While it's plenty of fun to play around with all the currentgeneration weaponry offered by Modern Warfare 2, there's nothing quite like a blast of hot laser to really shake up the battlefield. To satisfy our desires for truly futuristic warfare, this holiday season will see the release of Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Future Soldier. The game will feature a number of real life prototype weapons and other things that make "pew pew" noises when you fire them, and will feature "state-of-the-art single-player and multiplayer modes." The game's main release (current-gen platforms) is being developed by the same team that brought us GRAW and GRAW2, with a secondary release for Wii by another studio. Ubisoft is offering players an opportunity to get into the beta if you buy Splinter Cell Conviction when it releases on the 16th of April

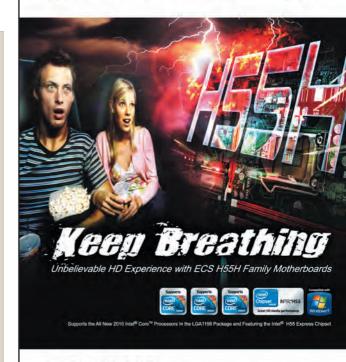
#### BETHESDA'S SECRET MMD

You know what the world doesn't need? A new World of Warcraft, Our current one is fine, and is a great place to store 13-or-so million gamers while the rest of the world gets on with real life. Bethesda, creators of the Elder Scrolls series disagrees. however, and has a few plans up their sleeves for their very own "World of Warcraft-type ммо.

At least, this is according to some legal documents that have been floating around a court case between the company and Interplay. If you remember (it's not like we'll let you forget, really), Bethesda desperately wants the rights to produce a Fallout MMO, but first has to prove that Interplay isn't living up to the agreement that gives them the right to do so. According to inside sources at Bethesda, the company is working on something right now, however; a project that apparently involves "close to a hundred people" and has a budget of "tens of millions of dollars. Is the company going out on a limb and secretly developing a Fallout MM0 without consent of the courts, with the assumption that they'll eventually win the case; or is this something completely different?







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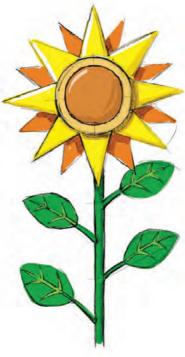
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# Sonic gets a kick in the pants

**SONIC THE HEDGEHOG IS** a strange creature. Not just in the "blue spiky hair, red sneakers, ring collecting fetish" kind of way, but in terms of the brand itself. Every single time a new Sonic is announced, the fans cheer and cry for joy, only to be disappointed by the result when the game actually hits

All of this means that we're either in for a new bout of woe or a pleasant surprise, because a new Sonic has just been announced, only this time it's going right back to the roots that put this hyperactive rodent on the gaming map in the first place: 2D platforming. That's right, no were-creatures, no isometric views, no RPGing, just good, old-fashioned sprinting from one end of a level to the other without a third dimension of motion in sight. Slyly named Sonic the Hedgehog 4, this reboot of the franchise is HD all the way, but all of the gameplay will take place on the trustworthy X and Y axis. It's also going to be episodic - surprise, surprise - with the first offering due out on WiiWare, PSN and XBLA (and a fourth, mystery platform - most likely the iPhone) around the middle of this year. Expect all of your favourites to make a return, including the spindash and power sneaker pickup.



#### **MOLYNEUX ON** FABLE III Fable III is little

more than a fable itself at this point, but already creator Peter take everything I say with a grain of salt" Molyneux is preparing the public to expect all manner of awe and wonder from the upcoming title. According to the Neux, *Fable III*, which is "almost at its final edit." is set to demonstrate examples of longestablished game mechanics which Lionhead intends to replace with more user-friendly and modern iterations Whether this means that Fable /// will actually be simpler to play than its predecessor remains to be seen, but the idea of dumbing down an already dead simple play mechanic has us a little concerned

## SEGA's not giving up just yet

**Sony's NEW MOTION CONTROLLER** almost has a confirmed name (it's Arc, but apparently Sony isn't quite 100% sure that they'll stick with that), Microsoft is happily buzzing away at promoting their upcoming Natal system, and Nintendo's obviously sitting happy with the Motion Plus attachment. You may think that has all the current consoles taken care of in terms of motion control, but SEGA isn't quite ready to give up on the console wars. Okay, that's an overstatement, the company has long since given up, but that hasn't stopped them from releasing yet another re-hashed Genesis (that's Mega Drive, to me and you) console with... wait for it: motion controls.

It's called the SEGA Zone Wireless Gaming Console. It combines 20 classic retro titles from the pool of game's we've come to expect from such a device, including Sonic, Alex Kidd and Golden Axe, but adds in 30 completely new games that are controlled by a suspiciously familiar-looking motion controller. 16 of the new games are sports titles, with the remaining 14 classified as "arcade games." While they all look pretty rubbish, it's impressive that the company is still making an effort to appease the retrogaming crowd, and maybe pull in a few accidental purchases from well-meaning albeit insufficiently-educated parents.



## Wii Motion Plus required for next Zelda

The Wii Motion Plus attachment is, pretty much, a necessity. Despite EA "complaining" in the past that it's too darn accurate, developers are slowly moving towards the idea that Wii games need to be played with the addon. It shouldn't come as too much of a shock, then, to learn that the next Zelda title will require Motion Plus; it apparently won't work at all without it

"After actually making it compatible," explains producer Eiji Aonuma, "it just feels so natural. Link's sword and the controller that you're holding become one.

It has also been revealed that the precise movements of Link's sword will be used in puzzle completion and fighting certain enemies. The studio is hoping to cobble together something playable by this year's E3, with the game's basic systems already nearly completed.





#### **GG Xbox LIVE**

If you're still playing *Halo 2* online, or any other original Xbox game, you better say goodbye to your old generation and move on with the times – the original Xbox LIVE service will be discontinued on April 14. If you cast your mind back about six months, you may remember we mentioned some limitations of the current XBL service caused by the old system; that's what all of this is about.

What this means, is that no original Xbox titles, whether played on the Xbox or Xbox 360, will function online. Halo 2, which is still a game still frequently played online, will take the biggest knock from this, and Bungie (or, what's left of them, at least) is clearly a little choked up about this move.

"We're all saddened at the realisation that an era is coming to an end, but looking back, we're incredibly fortunate to have had such a great run and such strong support from our fans."

The developer asks fans to come online on the 14<sup>th</sup> for "one final farewell and one final opportunity for all of you to kick our asses at Halo 2"

Microsoft is less sentimental, but nonetheless sensitive about the issue: "There's no greater example of the power of the Xbox LIVE community than the *Halo* franchise. *Halo* 2 has had an amazing run on LIVE, with a dedicated community more than five years after launch and well into the next generation of consoles. It has fundamentally changed the way we play videogames."

## Visceral wants to do Macbeth

Not content to simply scare the pants off you with *Dead Space*, or turn a classic poem into a sordid interactive bloodbath in *Dante's Inferno*, development studio Visceral Games is looking in Shakespeare's direction for some inspiration for a future title – *Macbeth*.

"Macbeth the game is something I've been thinking about for years," says producer Jonathan Knight. "But now, I think the emotional quality that games are achieving and the value level of the acting and the sound work makes it possible."

Break out the back-stabbing and walking forests, then. We're totally up for this.

#### They said it...

"I always preach to the staff, 'You must not have a delay after a release date has been announced. There is no greater crime as a game developer. A release date change is like betraying the expectations of everyone."

Hideo Kojima, former VP of Konami

"For me, as long as the game is enjoyable, I don't care if it's a sequel or not. But there is a level of trust and set of player expectations when working with a franchise that can both hurt and/or help you."

David Langeliers, creative director at THΩ

"Being Sony, I suppose we have a little more luxury to take a gamble on more original and innovative IP – and Heavy Rain definitely fits that category."

Lucy Duncan, Sony product manager

"[DLC is] nice for gamers, but it's great for developers too – it's something we can explore, and take risks with. There are things we've done in our DLCs that aren't the kinds of things we'd risk in the core game – because you know you're offering it to the audience that's the most dedicated and loyal."

Randy Pitchford, CEO of Gearbox Software



CM 690 II Advanced raises the bar again with improvements over the top-selling CM 690. This spacious mid-tower will keep enthusiasts happy with room for up to 3 VGA Cards, high-end CPU coolers, a top or bottom mounted water cooling radiator & a 1.8"/2.5" drive adaptor. It also features much improved airflow with an oversized mesh and enough space for up to 10 fans. Maintenance will be a breeze with the tool-free drive bays, new cable management and a CPU cooler retention hole.



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## I don't know who to trust anymore

US Navy says we rock: Venezuelan president says we're evil

## 11 VIDEOGAME PLAYERS PERFORM 10 to 20 percent higher in terms of

perceptual and cognitive ability than normal people that are non-game players." That's the word from Ray Perez, a program officer at the USA Office of Naval Research Warfighter Performance Department. Not only does he have an awesome title, but he's come up with some equally awesome results from a series of tests focusing on adult's abilities to think on their feet.

"We have to train people to be guick on their feet - agile problem solvers, agile thinkers – to be able to counteract and develop counter tactics to terrorists on the battlefield." Perez said. "It's really about human inventiveness and creativeness and being able to match wits with the enemy."

He uses the term "fluid intelligence" to describe the ability to change one's thinking to adapt to the situation at hand; to meet new problems and develop tactics and counter-tactics. "For the last 50 years, fluid intelligence was felt to be immutable," Perez said, "meaning it couldn't be changed, no matter what kinds of experiences you have."

This, he added, is related to the idea

of brain plasticity. "The presumption was that the structure of the brain and the organization of the brain are pretty much set in concrete by the time you are out of your teens." His studies ultimately revealed these past presumptions to be false, when a good dose of videogaming is involved, which essentially means that playing videogames can extend this ability of yours well into you adult life.

Then, you've got the other side of the coin, which we'll share with you mainly because it's so funny. In a recent radio interview, the Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez condemned videogames as "noison"

"These games they call PlayStation are poison," said Chavez, "Some games teach you to kill. They once put my face on a game. 'You've got to find Chavez to kill him.' [Games] promote the need for cigarettes, drugs and alcohol so they can sell them. That's capitalism - the road to hell."

Don't go down that evil road kids: it'll only lead to greater mental ability and loads of fun times.



#### TORCHLIGHT **BURNS BRIGHT**

Indie hack-n-slash and shameless Diablo clone Torchlight has been enjoying plenty of success on Steam. The game's developers have recently released updates to the game to bring it up to version 1.15, with a healthy list of free new content. Sadly, there's no multiplayer (yet). Along with a number of balance issues and general bugfixing, the update gives players five challenge room maps which are obtainable as rewards for completing various quests, as well as new challenges in the Tomb of the Awakened. Estherian Ruins **Dwarven Fortress** and more

#### Wii gets legendary

You have to hand it to Conduit developers High Voltage Software - their determination to bring more mainstream-focused titles to the Wii is heart-warming. Their next title is called Tournament of Legends, a mythological fighting game that will make use of the Wii's classic controller (a sign of a no-fuss approach to the controls), as well as the obligatory motion stuff.

Mythological creatures like the Minotaur, Valkyrie and "other well known and awe-inspiring characters" will battle it out in apparently fantastic fighting arenas, where they'll wield a selection of both typical and completely off-the-wall combat moves, including "unleashing a man-eating lion, summoning a deadly rain of arrows and throwing a nest of venomous snakes.

It sounds intriguing, but as is the case with all Wii games, rather wait and see what comes of this title before you commit yourself to a lifetime of servitude. Tournament of Legends will use High Voltage's Wii-exclusive and highly optimised Quantum3 engine, and is set to hit store shelves this May.



## Dinosaurs can capture points?

Dinosaurs are awesome. While a few games out there have put the player in front of one and said "survive," even fewer have given control of these ancient killing machines to the player. Russian-based Lukewarm Media thinks this is all a very poor state of affairs, and is seeking to remedy the situation with Primal Carnage.

The press release blurb reads: "The game is set on an abandoned military controlled island where an experiment gone awry unleashing colossal dinosaurs out of control. A team of tough mercenaries have been dispatched to prove to be indigestible and contain the threat.

Despite basically stealing the setup of Jurassic Park, Primal Carnage looks pretty decent. There are a number of multiplayer game modes focused around a 5v5, humans vs. dinosaurs idea, including 4 survival modes and capture the point, as well as a single player campaign. The studio has long-term plans to support the game with DLC, but isn't hesitant about releasing an SDK to the public along with support for custom content. So, if the idea of Jurassic Park meeting Left 4 Dead sounds like a good idea to you (and it should), look forward to this game hitting store shelves in Q4 of this year.





## First DLC for Dante's Inferno announced

It's pretty common these days for DLC to be released on or close to a game's shelf date, but it's not common that said DLC will include gameplay changes as massive as this: the upcoming DLC for Dante's Inferno will include co-op play as well as a mission editor.

Entitled *Trials of St Lucia*, this DLC will offer players the ability to craft their own scenarios (called trials), share them with the online world and download, and rate, trials from other users. The second player will take on the role of St. Lucia, a 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Christian martyr who's had her eyes plucked out and all sorts of other nasty stuff we've come to expect from this game. It's not clear yet whether or not you'll be able to play co-op in the main campaign or just the trials mode, but it's probably safe to assume it's the latter.

#### CMO No Go

Square Enix have announced that they will be closing down the *Championship Manager Online* servers at the end of April 2010. The announcement came because the publisher feels the game just isn't popular enough, but they have said that they will continue working with the franchise as a whole.

"We can confirm that CM Online, a joint initiative with Jadestone in Sweden, will be closing from April 30, 2010," Square Enix said. "We are re-focusing our vision for the Championship Manager franchise and hope to share more news soon."

"We want to thank the loyal players who have supported this product over the last few years and our partner Jadestone for all of their work on CM Online."

A post on the official *CM* website explained that the game failed to attract new users and didn't develop well enough.

"The decision to close the game was completely out of Jadestone's hands and they, legally, are unable to offer more information than that. By Jadestone's own admission, they have failed to attract enough people to CMO and the subscribers themselves generally complain the game wasn't developed enough."





# **Hacked!**

**Sony's PLAYSTATION 3 HAS** held an impressive front against piracy and hacking for the three years that it's been around. Many have tried, and failed, to hack the console... until now. Not surprisingly, it was well-known iPhone hacker George Hotz (known as geohot) who took the supposed honour. The 20 year-old Rochester Institute of Technology dropout has been tinkering with Apple's smartphone since its release on USbased AT&T networks in 2007. He was the first to break the device out of its network locks, and now regularly cracks updated firmware that Apple releases (often with the sole intent to stop hackers like Hotz).

After only five weeks of effort, Hotz claims that he's hacked the PS3 wide

open. "Basically, I used hardware to open a small hole and then used software to make the hole the size of the system to get full read/write access," he said in an interview, "Right now, although the system is broken, I have great power. I can make the system do whatever I want.

"I have read/write access to the entire system memory, and HV level access to the processor," he continued. "In other words, I have hacked the PS3.

While this move will undoubtedly lead to a rise in piracy on the console, once the hacked software has been moved into place, Hotz claims that this isn't really a goal for him. "Personally, it's a win for me just to do it," he said. "It's just cool to have

#### Rumour mill: Dead Space edition

is EA, and the juice in question is *Dead Space*. The company is supposedly looking to bring the Wii title *Dead Space Extraction* to the XBLA and PSN, with plans to retain the "guided first-person experience" of the original game. There's also talk of a Dead Space title called Planet Cracker, which is a "resource strategy game where players will manage a CEC Mining operation." Resources gained from this title can then be imported into Dead Space 2. It's likely that, if true, Planet Cracker will be released in the run-up to Dead Space 2's release

#### FFXIV TO **BE MULTI-**PLATFORM?

While the Western world is still busy salivating over the upcoming release of Final Fantasy XIII, Square is hard at work developing the next Final Fantasy, XIV, which will be an MMORPG to continue on from XI. Up until recently, everyone was told by Square that XIV is going to be PS3 exclusive, except that's all been done away with by the bravado (stupidity?) of one Square employee. On his LinkedIn CV, lighting lead Yuuki Akama states as plain as day that he's working on Final Fantasy XIV for the PS3, PC and Xbox 360. Akama's profile has since been removed from the professional social networking site, so this means no immediate confirmation (or, as importantly, denial) from Square or Sony Stay tuned for more updates; this could be big



## Blame-shifting?

Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello has blamed a tough 2009 on console manufacturers. He recently told investors that EA had a difficult year because Microsoft and Sony were too slow in reducing prices for their respective video game consoles. He also included factors like the title line-up and general poor economic conditions in his reasons for planning a "conservative" approach to 2010.

On the up-side, he did point out that console use is increasing - a trend which he believes will continue.

First up we do have data and research on the amount of time consumers are spending with games, and increasingly and importantly they're spending more time with their consoles than they ever have before - so I don't think it's a consumer behaviour issue if it's anything at all," Riccitiello said.

"I do think it's fair to characterise 2009 as a consequence of a relatively less powerful slate industry-wide, compared to 2008. I think the second factor was a lack of aggressive pricing from first parties, if you will. They were a little bit too late with their price cuts.

"And frankly and broadly, the economic circumstance - and the recession that hit most Western markets.

"As we look to 2010 there's nothing to suggest that consumers aren't going to increase the use of their console. Relative to others who have provided guidance, we've decided to be a little more conservative, and frankly that's a function of the fact that we haven't seen enough data to suggest that purchase behaviours are there yet in spades.

"What makes us feel good about it though is that it's a strong slate - we've got strong belief in the new motion control devices. So there's reason to be optimistic, we've just chosen not to because it's a better planning assumption to be more conservative here," he added.

#### FIFA Flies

With the FIFA World Cup about to spill truckloads of tourists onto South Africa, it's hardly surprising that the official FIFA video game is selling like hotcakes. This is likely to spur on sales of the recently announced World Cup special edition of the franchise. Then again, the FIFA games don't necessarily need a World Cup to sell well. FIFA 10, it was recently announced, made 9.7 million sales by the end of 2009. While this is just short of the sought-after 10 million mark, it's very likely that the game managed to achieve that vaunted goal in the first few months of 2010. FIFA 10 got almost everything right. The latest iteration of the franchise has proven wildly popular, and has achieved higher Metacritic scores for both Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 than any other release in the series

#### Gaming Charts



LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS..

#### **PLAYSTATION 3**

- 1 God of War III
- 2 BioShock 2
- 3 Heavy Rain
- 4 Darksiders 5 Dark Void

#### XBOX 360

- 1 Army of Two: 40th Day
- 2 Battlefield: Bad Company 2
- 3 Final Fantasy XIII
- 4 Alien vs. Predator
- 5 MX vs. ATV Reflex

#### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
- 2 Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
- 3 Bakugan
- 4 WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010
- 5 FIFA 10

- 1 Mass Effect 2
- 2 Assassin's Creed 2
- 3 Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight
- 4 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 5 Warhammer: Dawn of War 2 Chaos Rising

#### PSP

- 1 LittleBigPlanet
- 2 Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
- 3 Army of Two: 40th Day
- 4 MX vs. ATV Reflex
- 5 Assassin's Creed: Blood line

- 1 New Super Mario Bros Wii
- 2 Wii Fit Plus Bundle
- 3 How to Train Your Dragon 4 Tony Hawk Ride
- 5 Wii Sports Resort

- 1 Mario & Luigi: Browser's Inside Story 2 Mario & Sonic @ the Winter Olympics
- 3 How to Train Your Dragon
- 4 Alice in Wonderland
- 5 Percy Jackson & The Olympians

December 2009 figures provided by GfK www.gfksa.co.za

#### PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 2 FIFA 10
- 3 Assassin's Creed II
- 4 Resistance 2
- 5 Need for Speed: Shift

#### ABUA 3EU

- 1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 2 Assassin's Creed II
- 3 Forza Motorsport III
- 4 FIFA 10
- 5 Mirror's Edge

#### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Burnout 3: Takedown Platinum
- 3 Medal of Honor Vanguard
- 4 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
- 5 Need For Speed Underground 2 Platinum

- 1 The Sims 3 World Adventures
- 2 The Sims 3
- 3 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 4 Need For Speed Underground 2
- 5 CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder

#### PSP

- 1 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
- 2 FIFA 10
- 3 Gran Turismo Roadster
- WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
- 5 Need for Speed: Shift

- Wii Sports 1
- 2 Wii Sports Resort + Motion Plus
- 3 Wii Fit + Board
- New Super Mario Bros. Wii
- 5 Mario Kart Wii + Wheel

- 1 Prof. Kawashima's Brain Training
- 2 New Super Mario Bros.
- Mario Kart DS
- Prof. Kawashima's Brain Training
- 5 More Brain Training from Dr Kawashima

## Start Making Apps...

Apple's new iPad is falling into the "love it or loathe it" category of consumer devices. However, there are a few people out there that think it's the best thing since someone figured out how to strap round, disc-shaped things on to other things and call them "transportation." And some of those people have a lot of money to spend.

Take executives Kevin Wendle and Daniel Klaus, for example. They have created a company called AppFund, with the sole aim of assisting people developing applications for the iPad and other mobile tablet devices.

We believe that the iPad is a revolutionary device with the ability to transform everything from the way consumers experience content, media and social networking to the way businesses can use applications to revolutionise their operations. The possibilities for this device given its size and functionality could eclipse the application market for the smaller iPhone," an Appfund statement said.

"A whole new category of developers and entrepreneurs is going to emerge around the iPad and build applications that can be even more interactive and dynamic.

This year alone Apple is reporting that iPhone applications will grow to over 200,000. In that there is an expectation that developers will port their ideas to the iPad, we look forward to providing funding and thought capital to the entrepreneurs willing and able to harness this new and exciting marketplace.

AppFund will consider submissions from around the globe, starting around the middle of the year



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## Our zombie obsession grows

**O**H LOOK, MORE ZOMBIE stuff! We've discovered yet another way you can keep yourself entertained by slaughtering the undead; it's called Dead Frontier. This online, flash-based game is a top-down survival shooter. You create a character that lives in a persistent online world, and can jump into instances of this world with other players. The objective is simple: find each other, kill some zombies, scrounge around for some loot and try to stay alive.

There's also a bit of MMO-like gameplay in Dead Frontier. Players choose to play as one of twenty classes, each with their own specialisation and skills. Productivity classes can produce goods such as food and medical supplies. which can be traded to other players, service classes provide their skills to help others, like doctors and chefs (needed

to cook the food produced by a farmer). whereas other classes simply receive stat boosts, or similar benefits. Players can interact with each other, form parties and clans, and generally try to stay alive as much as possible. Venturing into the concrete jungle of Fairview is dangerous work, but potentially rewarding - make sure you've got plenty of supplies and a few friends along for the ride.

Dead Frontier is currently in perpetual open beta, as is the norm for web-based games. The developers are looking to have the final release ready for public consumption (although it already has over 250,000 players) towards the end of the year, along with a full 3D engine. In the meanwhile, it's already pretty playable. Head over to www.deadfrontier.com, sign up and get killing those zeds.

#### **WOW VS** CHINA

The Chinese government has, once again, become a fly in the WoW ointment. In March 2009 the General Administration of Press and Publishing (GAPP) announced that it would be targeting non-Chinese titles, to "avoid the excessive penetration of foreign culture among Chinese youth". WoW was specifically mentioned at the

The game relaunched in China in September. now managed by NetEase, and everything seemed to be going so well. until November came along, and GAPP ordered suspension of new registrations.

Once that particular problem was sorted out (at the end of 2009) things seemed smooth again. However, GAPP has once again suspended registrations.

#### THE BAGINATOR

badger, stomped by a demon and then resurrected, lost to the Internet torrents, only to return as the Dread Pirate Badger. All of this left him with a peg leg, an eyepatch and a healthy respect for demons.

On the weekends, the badger likes to run free in the long savannah grass near the highway by the airport. Often he dashes across the road (you know... to get to the other side). The peg leg and eyepatch have robbed him of his usual nimbleness. Too bad he didn't spot that truck carrying cybernetic body parts, which was luckily followed by an ambulance full of cybernetic doctors and scientists, which was luckily followed by a military jeep on its way to Vicinity 42 in Kempton Park (they do advanced experiments here in an underground lab). They worked for days on the battered remains of our poor badger and finally produced what you see on this page. He's still hiding (they wanted to use him for nefarious purposes) in the magazine – go get him. Remember, it's not going to be easy anymore – he's more advanced.

Send your sightings to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line March Badger and stand a chance to win a Badger T-shirt from Gamer's Gear.

#### LAST MONTH'S WINNER Ismail Ebrahim, p22



#### Sing along with MGS: Peacewalker

While RTSes all over are dropping base-building in favour of front-line battle management, the upcoming PSP game Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker, seems to be picking up where they left off. No, it's not an RTS, but it will involve base building of a sort. Whenever enemies in the game are killed, they're sent off to the player's home base, named Mother Base. There, they're sort of recycled, with the Fulton Recovery System, and put into the player's employ. The more you have of these

mindless troops, the bigger your base gets, gaining new functions and options for Snake's weapons and

The game will feature 4-player co-op, as well as 3v3 competitive play using the PSP's ad hoc wireless. Apparently, much of the inspiration for the versus mode is taken from Metal Gear Online. The game will also reportedly feature singing tanks and other vehicles. Apparently it'll all make sense in context; we're dying to know how.



## FINAL FANTASY BUNDLE

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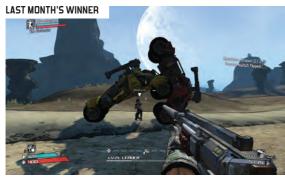
#### Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a copy of MX vs ATV Reflex for PS3, sponsored by Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [March Caption].



# THIS MONTH'S CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
"After having his chiropractor's licence revoked, Kratos
decided it was time for a career change."



"And that son, is how cars are made."

- Zander de Vos

#### **Events**

## MAGIC THE GATHERING

#### WORLDWAKE GAME DAY

When: 6 March Time: 9:30 Where: Bright Water Commons, JHB

#### NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

When: Every Friday Time: 19:00 Type: Standard, Constructed Cost: R30 novvagaming.co.za

#### 2-HEADED GIANT, EXTENDED/ VINTAGE

On request novvagaming.co.za

#### LANS

#### NOVVA LAN

When: 6 March Where: Novva Gaming, JHB Type: OpenLAN langames.co.za

#### MAYHEM MARCH 2010

When: 27 March Where: Boksburg Type: OpenLAN langames.co.za

#### YU-GI-OH!

#### TOURNAMENTS

When: Saturdays Time: 10:00 Where: Novva Gaming, JHB novvagaming.co.za



#### Release List

Release dates subject to change

#### **WEEK 1: MARCH**

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	PC, 360, PS3
Assassin's Creed II	PC
Silent Hunter 5	PC
Batman Arkham Asulym GOY	360, PS3

#### WEEK 2: MARCH

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Guitar Hero Van Halen	360, PS3, Wii
Sacred 2: Gold Edition	PC
Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War - Chaos Rising	PC
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories	PS2, PSP, Wii
Superstars V8 Racing	PC, 360, PS3
Sonic and SEGA All Stars Racing	PC, 360, PS3, Wii, DS
Final Fantasy XIII	360, PS3

#### **WEEK 3: MARCH**

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Supreme Commander 2	Pc, 360
God of War 3	PS3
Dragon Age: Origins: Awakening	PC, 360, PS3
Metro 2033	PC, 360
Command & Conquer 4	PC
Resident Evil Gold Edition	360, PS3
Zelda Spirit Tracks	DS
Picross 3D	DS
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	Wii
Yakuza 3	DS

#### WEEK 4: MARCH

	TITLE	PLATFORMS	
	Just Cause 2	PC, 360, PS3	
	Settlers 7	PC	
	Red Steel 2	Wii	
	Clash of the Titans	360, PS3	
	How to Train you Dragon	360, PS3, Wii, DS	
	Prison Break Conspiracy	PC, 360, PS3	
	GTA: Episodes form Liberty City	PC, PS3	
	Infinite Space	DS	

### No game yet... but here are some figures...

Polyphony Digital promised us the latest instalment of *Gran Turismo* around the time that ox-wagons made it over the plateau ridge, but the only thing they're releasing right now are figures. According to the developer, the overall *Gran Turismo* franchise has sold 55 million units. This includes the 1.8 million sales of the latest game for the PSP. With an expected (but unconfirmed) March release for *Gran Turismo* 5, Polyphony Digital seems to be trying to create excitement by showing just how popular their game is. Here are the sales figures for the franchise.

Gran Turismo	10,850,000
Gran Turismo 2	9,370,000
Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	14,890,000
Gran Turismo Concept Series	1,560,000
Gran Turismo 4 Prologue	1,350,000
Gran Turismo 4	10,980,000
Gran Turismo 5 Prologue	4,650,000
Gran Turismo PSP	1,800,000
Total	55,450,000



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## Filipino Magic and Blood

Y FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH magic came from watching a Filipino man split his thumb in half lengthwise and move the tip back and fourth. Later, I would repeat the trick with my index finger, except there would be gushing blood and the screams of children. As for the Filipino man, he didn't really cut his finger in half. Even at five years old, I understood that there was some kind of trick at work here. He did it again, obviously pleased at himself for being able to so easily delight the kid he was babysitting. Do it again, I asked.

Again, he brought his two hands together, split his right thumb using his left index finger, and separated the two parts. He made his bisected thumb jiggle a little, clearly indicating that his finger still worked as it should, in spite of the obvious distance between the pieces. He brought his thumb back together and made it whole, then showed me another magic trick. He correctly guessed, every time, which card I had drawn from a deck of playing cards, without him seeing which one I took. Again and again, he repeated the trick for me until I could take it no more and begged him to show me how it was done. And the thumb thing, I had to know how that worked.

Later that year, my father took me to a magic show. Oh boy, a REAL magician! It was a grand affair: dressing up nicely, taking a drive into the city, buying the tickets and walking into the theatre. Groups of children ran up and down the isles between the seats, echoing my own excitement. Except I didn't run around and squeal like children do at that age, it just wasn't proper. Pushing down the spring-loaded seat that snapped back up if left alone, I sat down and waited. My father sat next to me. I fidgeted with various things, wanting the show to start already. My hands idly fell to my side. The stage curtains pulled aside and there was the magician, looking every bit the part. The various children scampered to their seats. One jumped into the seat next to me

A bright gush of blood sprayed out from between our seats as my left index finger got bisected vertically neatly down the middle. When the child sat, the spring-loaded metal mechanism my hand was unthinkingly resting on, snapped together and played the part of child-eating monster. My scream was sufficiently terrifying. Pulling my hand up quickly, I had now six fingers. Bone was clearly visible between my new twin index finger, the gears had done a stellar job of cutting them cleanly.

My father leaned over and bound my finger together with his handkerchief and pulled me along to the hospital across the street. There, the German doctors deftly glued the bone back together, sew stitches all the way up and put my whole hand in a cast. To this day I still hold an irrational fear of springy gear-like mechanisms large enough to eat digits. I still carry around an odd annoyance that I missed the entire magic show. Twenty-five years later, and I've still not been to an actual magic show.

That Filipino babysitter did eventually relent to my constant pleading to show me how he worked such magic that day. He asked me one final time if I was really sure that I wanted to have the magic spoiled for me. Yes! Yes, I say! I must know how the

trick is done! It's driving me crazy, it's so awesome, I want to be able to do it too! He showed me how he did the thumb trick. I felt a little stupid; it was so obvious, why didn't I figure it out myself? He showed me how he did the card trick. I felt quite stupid; again it was obvious, and it only worked because I wasn't paying attention

There is a kind of regret one gets in moving beyond the magic into understanding. You're that little bit wiser, sure, and you've gained an appreciation for the magic itself, as a concept, as a context. The regret comes from knowing you will never taste that specific magic again. Once you understand how the magic works, it is no longer magic. You cannot unlearn a truth, as the saying

Some kinds of magic seem more resilient to being understood. The personal relationship between the words on a page and the person reading it, for example. The way you lose all sense of time when you're engrossed, really pulled in, to a game or comic book or movie. The word "qualia" is used to describe the "subjective quality" of conscious experience. The taste of your favorite food, the beauty in a pleasing arrangement of colours. What you find find in a video-game.

Daniel Dennett writes that qualia is "an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: the ways things seem to us.

With something as immediate and involving as a video game, the magic is quite personal, and as unique as the person playing. Every time I see the scar on my left index finger, running from the tip of the finger, through my fingerprint, down to my palm, I wonder if I should have said no to that Filipino man. NAG

> There is a kind of regret one gets in moving beyond the magic into understanding. You're that little bit wiser, sure, and you've gained an appreciation for the magic itself, as a concept, as a context.

> The regret comes from knowing you will never taste that specific magic again.











## R.I.P.: Rest in PC

YE BEEN WRITING THIS column for a year already, and, over the last eleven months or so ,I've been patriotic about our local gaming scene, bitched about piracy, and been facetious about the merits of owning multiple gaming platforms while underhandedly expressing my lacklustre opinion on the Wii. This latter judgement is slowly changing as a Wii has recently appeared in our household. Don't ask me what happened; I was distracted for a moment (I vaguely recall Jaffa Cakes being the cause of this) and it was suddenly there in one of those typical "it-followed-me-home-canwe-keep-it" situations. To make matters worse, the "little console that could" flattered the pants off me by giving me a perfect balance score in Wii Fit and telling me that I actually needed to put on 4kgs. Queue junk food binge, extend gaming sessions and cancel gym contract.

Anyway, I guess the point that I'm alluding to in this rather lengthy preamble to the body of my column, is that opinions change.

A few days ago I had an inkling as to what direction I wanted this column to go in. I planned to turn my attention towards the PC exclusive gaming crowd and, through Jedilike manipulation and subversive sneakiness, attempt to get them to branch out onto consoles. However, knowing the militant tenacity with which this group defends their platform (having once done the same myself), I realised that I would sooner be able to fall pregnant - so I decided to point my mental meanderings in another direction.

But then something went horribly wrong.

In the space of a few days I experienced two epiphanic moments that highlighted why console gaming is becoming my preference. Five years ago, if somebody had said to me that I would start turning my back on PC gaming, I would have bludgeoned them with a keyboard before ripping my shirt off (Hulk style!) to expose "P( G4/\/\3r pH0r L1Phe" carved into my chest – which, incidentally, I don't really have. I'm just being hyperbolic. And, yes, I had to use a L337 converter on the Internet to get that.

For those who frequent the NAG forums, you'll probably see where I am going with this, but for those who don't (and why on Earth not? We're a very friendly bunch that excels at making newcomers feel welcome) let me explain. I managed to get a copy of Mass Effect 2 for my PC on launch day, which in itself was a remarkable feat seeing as how the local launch was handled about as well as a neurosurgeon with Parkinson's would handle brain surgery using a sledgehammer. Upon attempting to install the game, the installer kept crashing and refusing to accept the second disc. Searching the Internet for solutions, I saw that this was a widespread issue affecting the PC version of the game. To add insult to injury, I had deliberated for days whether to buy it for my PC or my Xbox 360.

In between creating ISOs of the discs and copying the entire contents onto my hard drive, I hopped onto Xbox LIVE. Once online, I wasn't greeted by any friends wanting to play multiplayer; that was because they were all too busy playing Mass Effect 2. As subsequent logins showed their Gamerscores increasing thanks to Mass Effect 2 achievements, so too did my blood pressure and the risk of a stroke (Ha! Try and gauge that Wii Fit!)

The second epiphany happened a few days prior to the Mass Effect 2, sputum covered abortion. I finally got hold of a copy of Modern Warfare 2 for my Xbox 360. Every shred of PC gamer inside me was crying out in dismay at my defection to console FPS controls, but the protest went ignored. To my utter delight, the controls were responsive and the snap-to targeting mechanic meant that I was deftly popping caps into so many terrorists it would've given George Bush a hard on. Oh yes, and my multiplayer works just fine, thanks. In fact it takes little longer than 10 seconds to find and launch games over Xbox LIVE on a 384k line... yes PC gamers, your tears of envy are clear.

I'm not sure whether I feel saddened by my waning affection towards gaming on my PC. Perhaps I'm getting old and impatient, but the instant gratification that console gaming provides me is becoming a preference. Since owning consoles, my PC has always been the preferred platform for FPS games and the like, but now even that final bastion of superiority is crumbling. Add to this the plethora of compatibility problems as well as DRM issues (sadly, a necessary evil) and it's a wonder that every PC gamer doesn't already own a second platform. It's bizarre, but these days I don't feel like I'm gaming unless I'm on a console. NAG

> To my utter delight, the controls were responsive and the snap-to targeting mechanic meant that I was deftly popping caps into so many terrorists it would've given George Bush a hard on.















## BACK: 2009

ND OUR YEAR OF the Decade award Agoes to: 2009! It was a tough choice, with so many years in the last ten years having been utterly fantastic. It may be a bit premature to give it to Twenty-Oh-Nine, since there's still one year left in the decade\*, but we don't think even Twenty-Ten can top Twenty-Oh-Nine's feature list. Think about it (but not too much): Modern Warfare 2 (the best game ever, experts agree), Avatar (the best movie ever, experts agree), the death of Michael Jackson (even if experts disagree on whether he's actually dead or not), Microsoft and Sony having a better press conference at E3 than Nintendo (landmark moment, we cried a little), the list goes on! Old franchises rekindled, new franchises born and taking their first baby steps towards our open gamer hearts... makes you feel young again!

#### YOUR BEST GAMES OF: 2009

You, the readers (those of you who read our website at least), voted! You scribbled your little notes, we counted and tallied and all that math stuff, and the power of the people bespoke of the Greatest Games released in 2009:

#### **BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM**

The power of the man-bat harnessed through solid, precise controls. Arkham Asylum, presented in stunning 3D thanks to Unreal Engine 3. The Joker, voiced by Mark Hamill at his finest. Gameplay, freshly pressed from the Metroid/ Castlevania mould. The Riddler, leaving little puzzles for you to solve. The finest Batman game ever made won your hearts and rightfully so. The game's tip of the hat to survival-horror Eternal Darkness, melted our hearts.

#### **BORDERLANDS**

There ain't no rest for the wicked, money don't grow on trees! We got bills to pay, mouths to feed, ain't nothing in this world for free. So we're going to find more guns than the population of the Netherlands. shoot more badguys than the polygon count on Lara Croft's twin peaks and grind our way into the early morning with Borderlands. This funky fresh new intellectual property was one of the few games to make it's publisher money. Gearbox did good, you said. You're right, as always.

#### DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

The "Morrigan dating simulator" and spiritual successor to platinum-age role-playing sensation Baldur's Gate got enough votes to level up all the way into this list. It's rich, heady blend of dwarven political intrigue, elvish racial divides, house-trained werewolves and surreal dream-scape rodent racing more than



the bobsled team, give your snail

Renaissance-period Italy, stealth-

chocolate



sated your appetites for stat-based headpounding and magic-missile casting. Some of you had sex with the elf assassin guy though. We're telling your mom.

#### **MODERN WARFARE 2**

Explosions, pigeons, guns, terrorists, space! Helicopters, Russians, camping snipers, airports! There's something for everyone in Modern Warfare 2, and, for everyone else, the bustling online servers filled with people who can kill you with their minds. All that fuss and ruckus about lack of dedicated servers and sensationalism about shooting people at airports or babies in cribs - whatever - sure didn't stop this game from selling. Activision likes to ride its solid gold jet through space, thanking you with their hearts.

#### STREET FIGHTER IV

Nothing shows your respect and admiration for a worthy opponent like some cheap moves, cheap throws and chip-damage to their dwindling healthbar and self-respect because you pick Ken and just spam fireballs over and over you \*\*\*\*! The king of fighters returned with a swagger and dragon-punch, indestructible (unlike your gamepad). Balanced (as long as you don't pick Sagat, you cheap \*\*\*\*), fun and tight, everything you wanted, so you paid for it. We don't blame you, we did too.

Six iterations young and still able to air-juggle your ass into next week, the Tekken franchise fights back with it's finest revision yet. It's got all the bases covered: kangaroos, robots, fat guys, hot chicks and a level with sheep on a hill accompanied by a techno-yodelling sic track. There has never been a better time to be a Tekken fan: the online setup and character customisation sings and dances for your amusement, just how you like it.

#### UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

Did you see that level where you're hanging on to the side of the train and like, WHOA HOLY CRAP THAT'S AWESOME. Uncharted 2 gave you so much bang for your buck you started feeling guilty and paid extrafor some multiplayer skins so you can run around as one of the aliens from Resistance: Fall of Man. Hot graphics, hot gameplay, hot cutscenes, hot multiplayer, not everything; far more than you, or we, erved, but we got it anyway.

#### Important Things '09

The Microsoft press conference at E3 2009 was almost over, when suddenly: surprise announcement! Final Fantasy XIII would also be released on Xbox 360! The main Final franchise, which had been like, the PlayStation 1, was going to go multiplatform. The universe exploded somewhat.

Since development on DNF started in 1997, every time the game was almost done, 3D Realms headman George Broussard kept scrapping it and starting over. Finally, Take The DNF team was let go (they all left anyway). Take 2 is suing 3D realms to get the license so they can finish *Forever*. The last game 3D Realms released as a

After a long and mostly fruitful relationship with Activision, id Software started seeking greener publishing pastures (they didn't like competing for attention Call of Duty). ZeniMax Media (they publish Bethesda games) stepped up and bought id Software. The news that id Software could be bought shocked older gamers.

Game Developer Deathwatch 2009 Grin, (1997-2009), passed on after the financial difficulties of making expensive mediocre games. the gods of CTF, deny being dead, say they're just "restructuring" America's Army 3 Developer, (2007-2009), after arguing with the army, the army fired them all. Ensemble, (1995-2009), gave us Age of Empires and Halo Wars, then Microsoft fired them all. Pandemic, (1998-2009), made a bunch of cool games but EA didn't want them anymore. Factor 5. (1987-2009), suddenly got left without funding and died soon after. Midway, (1973-2009), the old dog couldn't pull any new tricks, went bankrupt, passed on.

stab people, pay hookers to hide you.

metal, stay for the humour, try not to hate the real-time strategy.

man with a dog and a tactical-nuke launcher. Classic.

relationship of an action-RPG that hurts but is so good.

Killzone 2: Pretty to look at, pretty to play. Online matches are great. Why didn't you buy it?

inFamous: According to people, it's better than Prototype and the electricity-powers are awesome.

Prototype: According to people, it's better than inFamous and the mutant-powers are awesome.

Left 4 Dead 2: Better than 1, and stay in the Safe Room for storytime with the redneck

two-player co-operative play. Nuff said.

wrapped up in modern Unreal Engine pants. Very good.

"physics simulations per second"

joy of a thousand deaths or leave vour weaksauce at home

Dawn of War II: Bigger, better and packed with more Dakka and WAUGH real-time strategy.

have so many little virtual things to do, you won't leave home.

player relationship-ending co-op family-feud funfest.

## FLASHFORWARD: 2010

Out with the old, in with the new! It's the year of the Golden Tiger (says the Chinese and they know kung-fu so don't mess with that, yo) and that means Golden Tiger quality excitement will be coming your way! Movies, games, expensive toys and expensive peripherals for your pre-existing expensive toys: time to apply for that second credit card and renew your subscription to NAG, because you don't want to miss a thing

#### 2010 MOVIES!

For as long as we can remember, every year we say, 'this year is going to be big for movies'. Sometimes we swap the 'big' for 'huge' or 'major' or 'proper'. Finally one did crack it big, huge, etc. Avatar! But big doesn't even begin to describe the \$2.2 Billion-plus smile on James Cameron's face.

There were other cool movies in 2009 but we don't care to remember any of them after the 3D blue shininess of Avatar. The exception of course is District 9 - sheer genius that one. We do think Sharlto Copley (Wikus van de Merwe) should have at least bagged a supporting actor nomination for his high level of commitment in that movie - hands down the best human to alien transformation

since Michael Jackson. Oh, also Inglourious Basterds. But we digress.

#### Here's what we think will be major, huge, big, etc. in 2010

- · Not a definitive list
- A certain bias towards science fiction, action and super heroes is

#### **CLASH OF THE TITANS**

Sam Worthington from Avatar features in this remake of the classic Greek mythology romp with Harry Hamlin, a metal owl and a flying horse. All good back then, especially the giant scorpions (you should see them now). Just not sure why Pegasus is black in the remake - we thought he was supposed to be white. What's wrong with white, not black enough or is this now a politically correct horse?

#### THE EXPENDABLES

Get a load of this cast, Sylvester Stallone (also directing), Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mickey Rourke, Jason Statham, Sylvester Stallone, Brittany Murphy, Jet Li and Dolph Lundgren. Can't be true right? But it is. After the recent Rambo, we all





Tom Cruise, Cameron Diaz, catchy name, okay director - could be fun.

#### Piranha 3-D

Piranha are like zombies – they make everything better. Add 3D ,and it's a win. [ The rest of the NAG staff don't think this belongs here Michael]

A Nightmare on Elm Street One, two Freddy's coming for you; three, four let's rehash the past nothing more fun that watching teenage girls in their underwear. Oops, is this thing on.

This is a mystery and apparently a legacy too (it really is), what was once a cool idea might not resonate with the post Avatar generation.

This is going to be epic, but only if they didn't show all the good bits in

## Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief Uma Thurman is Medusa – SOLD!

She's been turning us to stone for years - LOL.

#### Salt & Shutter Island

We had to put these in here to keep



### Things we can't bring ourselves to like but will be huge (maybe)

**The Twilight Saga: Eclipse** It's all young boys taking off their shirts and biting teenage girls who don't take off theirs. This is of course

## Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I

Part 1 of 2 is really more like part one of \$500 million. Well done to

Warner for figuring out a way to turn seven multi-million dollar million dollar blockbusters. Pity the last movie was so rubbish and boring and dull and boring, also a little dull and rubbish.

#### The Last Airbender

Based on the animated series,

Avatar: The Last Airbender due to the Avatar part...). No real names in it and directed by string of flops put this one in this list. Hardcore fans are going to hate us, but be honest. The Happening was crap and you know it. [Was not. -Miktar]

have a newfound respect for Sylvester Stallone What should we expect from this one? A glittering Oscar night or an exploding testosterone volcano with dead bodies raining from the sky...

#### **JONAH HEX**

Megan Fox. We'd watch an eight hour documentary about why gaming causes violins in children hosted by the disgraced Jack Thompson if she was there clicking the PowerPoint presentation click button thing. We love you Megan, please be naked in more movies. This movie has zombies BTW. Oh, it's also set in the late 1800s. Wild West zombies and Megan Fox - ponies!

#### INCEPTION

Some clues to greatness: director is Christopher Nolan (yes, he did Batman); Leonardo DiCaprio (probably one of the best actors of all time). Then we have Ken Watanabe, Ellen Page, Michael Caine and

Tom Berenger. Yes, it's all just actors and a director at this stage, but it looks sweet.

#### **IRON MAN 2**

If you don't know why this movie is here then follow these instructions. 1. Get to the top of a really tall building. 2. Throw yourself off.

#### THE BOOK OF ELI

Post apocalyptic anything will always get gamers interested. Hell, even a post apocalyptic movie written. directed and starring Leon Schuster might get us interested. This one has Denzel Washington in it, and we all know he can act his way into and out of anything. This is his first sci-fi movie, so who knows how it'll all shake down. Gary Oldman (you should know who he is) and Mila Kunis (Mona Sax in Max Payne) are also in it. That's a wrap... Enjoy the popcorn and let yourself go.

#### On the fence

#### **Robin Hood**

Men in tights and something about worn out clichés, can Russell Crow pull off another Gladiator. It's also directed by Ridley Scott from Blackhawk Down, Gladiator and of course Blade Runner fame. Who knows? In all honesty, it's just the tights we're stuck on. Not even Russell Crow can pull off tights (go on, give us another raised eyebrow).

**Alice in Wonderland** It's *Pirates of the Caribbean* meets a 'Rabbits and their Warrens' documentary in 3D with CGI and smoked-up cats and up-tight queens. going to see it just for Johnny Depp a.) Because we all know the story and the Chocolate Factory. [The rest of the NAG staff thinks this should have been on the short list insead of Piranha 3-D Michael]

#### A-Team

The trailer looks ridiculous, and if any of you remember watching the original television series... think back... Your vision should be going all hazy now and... cue a helicopter crashing into a mountain, exploding, falling 100 feet to the ground and exploding again followed by hundreds of tonnes of rocks tumbling onto the burning wreckage and all the guys come stumbling out rubbing their heads like nothing happened. You like that then? You like this now. Oh, it has one major thing going for it - Sharlto Copley as Murdock!

Kevin Smith directs Bruce Willis, Tracy Morgan (a black guy) and some other big names in a comedy cop movie. Might be a LOL with thing is he didn't write the script, so was good but not great, and we need

**RoboCop** Rehash this movie – how dare they? How can anyone improve on that scene in the building when ED 209 malfunctions? How? Well, the only saving grace here might be the director, Darren Aronofsky - he's done some special stuff in the past including The Wrestler, The Fountain and Requiem for a Dream. This one did receive the most flak about being in this section..

**The Green Hornet**This is a delightful animated movie in love with an ant living inside a Geiger counter. Oh, no, wait that's something else. This one is really man. Like Batman, almost... but not famous, cool or interesting. Some decent actors are involved and might save the day. But it's just not Batman.

# 2010 CONSOLE & HARDWARE STUFF!

#### PS3-MOTE

This year, PlayStation 3 owners will be getting in on the waggle-motion revolution, except it'll be way cooler, of course. The hand-held wand for PS3 uses the PlayStation Eye webcam to track it's movement while internal sensors (a three-axis linear accelerometer and a three-axis angular rate sensor) track motion. It looks a little like a sex toy; the orb on the tip can glow any colour (it serves as a marker for location and distance). It has Bluetooth 2.0, rechargeable lithium-ion battery, buttons on the surface, analogue trigger, vibrates (mmm) and up to four controllers can be tracked by the Eye.

It's codename was "Gem", but it may be called "Arc" on release. There have been nine launch games announced (working titles): Ape Escape, Echochrome 2, Eccentric Slider, Sing and Draw, Champions of Time, Motion Party, The Shoot, Tower and Under Siege. Support for existing games through updates

include: LittleBigPlanet, Pain, Flower, Hustle Kings, EyePet and Resident Evil 5: Alternative Edition.

#### **STEREOSCOPIC THREE-DEE ON PS3**

The Blu-ray Disc Association (BDA) has finalized the "Blu-ray 3D" specification. It's full HD 1080p (which is cool, we think), but it needs a compatible television (apparently, one that gets at least 120hz on the refresh thingy). This stereoscopic 3D for the PS3 uses polarized lenses (like going to a 3D cinema to watch Avatar again). The PS3 will get an update to utilize the awesome three-dee for games and movies.

#### NATAL-GAZING

This add-on peripheral for the Xbox 360, code-named Natal, promises a natural user interface using gestures and spoken commands so you won't have to touch yourself or anything else



for true "controller-free gaming and entertainment". It's aimed at broadening 360 audiences, and reportedly will form the basis of a "new" 360, which is to say, a new retail configuration. Microsoft believes the lifecycle of the 360 will last through 2015 (apocalypse aside). The sensor bar for Natal is 23cm wide, has an RGB camera, depth sensor, multi-array microphone, heat-seeking missiles (not really, but wouldn't that be cool) and provides "full-body 3D motion capture", facial recognition, voice recognition and the microphone allows for acoustic source localisation and ambient noise suppression.

That last bit apparently lets you voice-chat over LIVE without a headset. The depth sensor is an infrared projector combined with monochrome CMOS sensor, which lets it see in 3D. The sensor bar was originally going to have a hardware chip inside for processing the magical bone system that maps the player, but it was dropped for a software solution to lower the price. The sensor bar will use 15 percent of the 360's computing power for it instead. Developer Rare recently leaked that they're working on a Wii Fit clone to launch with the Natal.

#### NINTENDO DOESN'T STOP

First came the DS. It had two screens, one of them touch-sensitive. Then the DS Lite: slimmer, lighter, more screen brightness, rearranged buttons. Then the DSi: thinner, larger screens, SD card slot instead of GBA cart slot, two cameras, a web-browser, faster CPU, internal storage, upgraded Wi-Fi capability. Then the DSi XL: huge screens, no other changes. Now, Nintendo CEO Satoru Iwata says the next DS will have highresolution screens and a motion sensor. Rumours indicate it might use a new NVIDIA graphics chip. No word on when it'll be out, but probably right after you buy the DSi.

#### WII HD?

Nintendo insists that they're not working on a new Wii, an upgraded Wii, a Wii HD, or any such thing. They insist it quite vehemently, going on record to say that until they make a serious hardware change to their consoles, they won't be releasing a new Wii.



"We're working on a new technology that goes even faster than USB 3.0 called Light Peak. Light Peak has the ability to transfer data at 10 gigabits per second. Ten gigabits per second means you can download an entire Blu-ray movie in less than 30 seconds. Light Peak has the potential to replace all the cables that are connecting your systems today - VGA, Ethernet and DVI. It is the I/O performance and connection for the next generation. You can expect PCs to have this technology about a year from now."

Intel CEO, Paul Otellini - CES 2010 Keynote

#### **USB 3.0**

Shown at CES already, USB 3.0 is a hundred times faster than 2.0. That's a lot. It is going to change how we view and use mammoth mobile storage capabilities, what kinds of peripherals we'll be able and eager to connect, and perhaps most importantly, It'll change the very way in which input works. This bandwidth opens up whole new avenues of controller possibilities.

#### COMPETITIVE HARDWARE PHYSICS

NVIDIA is an absolute superpower right now. Not only are their GPUs by far the fastest, they can handle PhysX! And with the weight of this giant behind the tech, developers are crawling out of the woodwork desperate to develop PhysX titles. We're still hoping against hope for some sort of competitive alternative from ATI, but, either way, hardware accelerated physics comes to PC gaming full force in 2010.

#### **CHEAPER CORE 15S**

There's no doubt that Intel's Core i7 kit is massively superior in raw performance, but the AMD competitors continue to simply annihilate them on price. It's not even a joke anymore. There's a crystalclear divide, money-no-object corporate execs buy Core i7s, regular average-Joe

gamers run Phenoms. Comparable performance at a ludicrous saving. We're hoping that Intel bring the power of the platform to the people this year with more affordable Core i5 solutions.

#### **SMARTPHONE BATTLE**

Google versus Apple versus Microsoft, winner take all. The smartphone market is going to go insane this year, as Google floods consumers with Android, hopefully at good prices, Apple continues developing for the App Store, as well as the 4G due this year, and Microsoft finds a way to battle back into a piece of the pie it just about created. Should be a good fight, so if the ladies and gentlemen would please take their seats... Oh yes, there will be blood.

#### **E-READERS BECOME** THE SECOND DECADE'S IPOD

Yes, the world is moving digital at breakneck speed today, but we do need the devices to support the revolution. This year e-book readers ought to multiply at a frightening lick, driving all-purpose digital media to absolute stardom. Prices will come down, form factor, aestheticics, useability, interface - all will improve. Everyone will have to have them, and not just geeks. We're guite hoping to read the 2010 Pratchett masterpiece on one of these.

#### Hardware Specific

NVIDIA GF104. Dual GPU version of the most complex GPU ever built, but quite possibly the most revolutionary GPU since the introduction of the GPU in 1999! In addition to the GPU being GPU to natively support and execute other features previously reserved for general processors. With more than 8 times the geometry performance of last generation graphics cards and more than 3 times the shader powerful and certainly the most ambitious Graphics card ever built.

#### **DERRICK CRAMER**

GeForce 400 series. After the great series, NVIDIA has been left behind somewhat in the graphics race. All of this is about to change, or we hope so at any rate, with the introduction of the GeForce 400 series in March. More competition, lower prices, the consumer wins

Intel 6 core i7 processors. Performance previews of these chips have the PC world very excited. The increase in performance over the older four core chips makes the upgrade well worth it for the overclockers, graphics designers and video encoders





# 2010 GAMES

#### BAYONETTA

The creator of the Stylish Action Fighting genre Hideki Kamiya (he made Devil May Cry), finally returns with a true sequel (since he didn't make DMC2 through 4). Highlighting how copycat those paper tiger pretenders to the genre are, Bayonetta is pure uncut videogame with some ironic sass.

#### DARKSIDERS

It's God of War meets Zelda, with big and chunky Korn-album-cover style art by Joe Mad of Marvel Comics fame. You ride a giant black flaming horse named Ruin, cutting up demons and angels as you collect various powers and abilities with which to punch dragons. It's what every gamer dreams of.

#### MASS EFFECT 2

Space - it's a pretty big place. Too big for one, or even two Mass Effect titles to cover, which is why we're getting a trilogy. The Empire Strikes Back (minus Luke Skywalker) of the Mass Effect trilogy delivers better combat, streamlined controls, improved visuals and, basically, just numerous improvements over the original.

#### **GOD OF WAR III**

Previously on God of War, Kratos punched some stuff, unleashed the Titans and is now gearing up for an allout attack on Zeus and his pantheonic bro-gods. It's the top-tier franchise PlayStation 3 owners have been waiting for. Bring on the Greek Grappler for his third round!

#### **HEAVY RAIN**

Quantic Dream's spiritual sequel to Fahrenheit is around the corner and it's going to blow your mind. Incredible visuals, out-there control system and a story depressing enough to kick your prescription into overdrive are just some of the fantastic features you can look forward to in this thrilling interactive film.

#### DARK VOID

It's The Rocketeer! Only, you know... not really. While Dark Void may not have broken any records for most amazing story ever, the combination of awesome ideas and slick presentation should be enough to put aside your differences with it and settle down for some good old-fashioned alien blasting.

#### **BIOSHOCK 2**

Remember getting your assed kicked six ways from Sunday by the brass-clad Big Daddies in Bioshock? Now it's your turn, but you've got more than a drill bit and a few rivets at your disposal plasmids, EVE-hungry little sisters and miniguns await those who step into this the world of Rapture for a second time.

More fighters, more backdrops, rebalanced, new super-moves for the entire existing cast and reworked online play. All for half the usual price. Capcom sure know how to please their fans lately. Never change, Big C.

#### SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Sam Fisher's gone rogue! He's also pretty pissed that the death of his daughter was no accident. He's being hunted by Third Echelon, but he's got a whole new bag o' tricks to take on his former handlers. A cooperative campaign, new gameplay mechanics and a deadly, bearded man: they're all

#### HALO: REACH

No Master Chief here, just the six members of Noble Team - six Spartans with their own unique roles: squad leader, heavy weapons, stealth specialist, sniper, assault specialist and you. A new engine, revamped art direction and more of that Halo-juice we can't stop drinking.

Squad-based, team-centric, missionfocused, sweet-looking, free-running science-fiction first-person shooter from the guys that brought you Quake Wars. By holding down one button, you can run anywhere and climb anything climbable.

#### STARCRAFT II

It has to come out eventually. Maybe 2010 will be the year of StarCraft II. Maybe not. We just want to play the damn thing before our vision begins to fail us and people start offering us pensioner's discount at the supermarket on Tuesdays, without us even having to ask.

#### **SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2**

More of the same 3D planet-jumping platforming, add in some Yoshi action who can inflate like a balloon or run faster if he eats different coloured fruits) and a drill that lets Mario dig through dirt. Oh, and switches that slow

#### **CRACKDOWN 2**

Bring on the sandbox mayhem. Character customisation for this sequel is being enhanced and improved, as are the skills of your Agent of choice. This time you'll be able to jump higher, run faster and shoot things even better. It's got four-player co-op (as well as competitive multiplayer) too.

#### CRYSIS 2

Now on consoles! Powered by Crytek's shiny new CryEngine 3, Crysis 2 is part two of what the developers aim to be a trilogy. We read somewhere that we'll





be heading to a "new type of jungle": New York City. Sweet. Now just give us the Nanosuit 2 so we can kill heavily armed soldiers with thrown chickens.

#### **EPIC MICKEY**

From Warran Spector (System Shock, Deus Ex) comes a platformer with mild RPG elements, part of Disney's effort to re-brand the Mickey by showing his mischievous side. Spector has been working with Pixar on this project, so hopes are high.

#### ALIENS VS. PREDATOR

Three playable races (in both single player and multiplayer), tons of brutality, some acidic blood and a Horde mode is pretty much all you need for a good AvP game. Aliens vs. Predator has all of that and more. It's also being developed by Rebellion Developments, who made Aliens versus Predator for the PC back in 1999.

#### MAX PAYNE 3

We haven't seen Max in a while and time definitely hasn't treated him very well. We're not sure whether a beer gut is more impressive in bullet time, but we're sure that heated debate will be settled by Max Payne 3.

#### MAFIA II

Hey, you do me a favour; I do you a favour. That's how it works. The mob takes care of its own, but if you mess me around you'll find yourself at the bottom of a river with some fancy new concrete shoes.

#### **LOST PLANET 2**

Set ten years after Lost Planet, LP2 sees the vast snowy wastelands of E.D.N. III melted away to reveal the true terrors lying beneath. Four-player coop, ridiculously huge monsters to fight and tons of weapons to fight them with; don't miss out on this one.

#### ALPHA PROTOCOL

A modern-day action-RPG from a studio made up of former-Black Isle developers. Alpha Protocol will see the player taking on the role of a secret agent who's been betrayed by his country and forced to fend for himself in a wasteland of conspiracy and deception.

#### **BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**

We've had a taste of it thanks to the beta, but now we're ready for more Battlefield. Whether it'll be able to take on the mighty Call of Duty in terms of popularity remains to be seen, but we're hoping it brings something incredibly special to the FPS genre (the multiplayer in particular).

#### RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Cowboys! Horses! Gatling Guns! This game has everything the Wild West

# 2010 GAMES!

has to offer, plus Rockstar's awesome sandbox-style exploration, the often hilarious Euphoria animation engine and a super slo-mo combat system. It's time to grab your chaps, strap on your spurs and load up the six-shooters.

#### MAG

256 players on a single server? Sounds like things could get crazy, even if making a significant impact on your own won't really be possible (we're told that good teamwork is more important in MAG than individual player skill). Persistent stats, ongoing factionbased campaigns and customisable characters will all feature in this one.

#### FINAL FANTASY XIII

It's time for another Final Fantasy. This next title promises all the spiky-haired angsty teenagers, impossibly large swords and Blizzagas you could ever want. It's also the first time a non spinoff, single-player FF is stepping onto the Xbox 360, so, like - big news.

#### NO MORE HEROES 2: **DESPERATE STRUGGLE**

Travis Touchdown (best name ever) is back, swinging his beam katana and making you look like a waggle-mad fool. Still the only franchise in the world that makes you recharge a pseudolightsaber by jacking off. Well, not really, but you didn't think we weren't going to mention that, did you?

#### STAR TREK ONLINE

It's already being billed as every Trekkie's wet dream come true, but as always, time will tell the success of this boldly going MMO. Space battles, land battles, ship battles, ensigns, science officers, impulse engines; this game has it all. We're still waiting for news on a Klingon localisation.

#### DANTE'S INFERNO

Soon to be a major motion picture (because everyone wants to make a movie of a popular game), Dante's Inferno may be a rather tactless gouging of classic literature for the sake of showing gore and tits, but we're cool with that, if they make a God of War clone based on Moby Dick next.

#### **ALAN WAKE**

This one's been an emotional rollercoaster of excitement, indifference, amusement and excitement again (thanks to recent trailers) as it's development cycle (it was first announced in 2005) has progressed. It's essentially Alone in the Dark, but not. We just really want to (finally) get a chance to play it.

#### RED STEEL II

The first Red Steel: not a great game. Ubisoft wants to change your perception of the series with the sequel by adding MotionPlus support (to improve the swordplay and the gunslinging), more swords, more guns and more things to shoot guns and swing swords at. Good times.

#### SIN AND PUNISHMENT 2

We love on-rail shooters, especially ones based on rare old properties from developer Treasure. We're odd that way. In SaP2, you control your movement along the rail, shoot stuff and melee missiles back at enemies.

#### **METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACEWALKER**

Set after Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater and Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops, this game features two-player coop through the main missions and fourplayer co-op in boss missions. Choose from four Snakes, like Armoured Snake or Naked Snake. You can even cuddle together in a cardboard box.

#### PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS

With the latest reboot of the franchise evidently not going according to plan, Ubisoft has decided to take things back to the series that made the world fall in love with PoP all over again. Forgotten Sands will continue the Sands of Time series and, frankly, that's perfectly fine with us.

#### METROID: OTHER M

Team Ninja (of Ninja Gaiden) is making a Metroid! Nintendo said it would be more like the traditional series as opposed to the Prime series, and it would have a "harder edge". Yeah, edgy Morphball action.

#### I AM ALIVE

We know almost nothing about this game. All we know is that, in it, mankind has been reduced to a shell of its former glory, left to fight over bottled water. Or something. It's the not knowing that has us all excited for this one. At least we know someone is alive.

#### **GRAN TURISMO 5**

Despite numerous delays and angered PS3 owners, GT5 is still set to be the next big thing in racing sims. It's said to feature over 1,000 vehicles and 70 circuits set in 20 locations, which would seem excessive for anyone who hasn't played the legendary series before.

#### CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

Franchise reboot alert! Patrick Stewart narrated the trailer! Things are looking up for the Castlevania series with it's upcoming first outing on the next-gen. Konami says this game will surprise you.





#### STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

It's an MMORPG. It's being developed by BioWare. If any one title could change the way we play MMOs, it'd be this - the first of BioWare's forays into the (entirely) online space. At least, we hope so. That hot female Twi'lek character named Shar'nad'aa is rolled by a dude named Kirby, just by the way..

#### **WORLD OF WARCRAFT:** CATACLYSM

We're not sure what the big deal is, but apparently 13 million players around the world are ready to sacrifice their own parents to get inside Cataclysm. There's some sort of dragon, and a Level cap being raised; it's all a little bit too much for us to truly understand.

#### MODNATION RACERS

If Trackmania and LittleBigPlanet got together one night after the office party, this is what would emerge nine months later. Build your own tracks, design your own racers and vehicles, share them on PSN and download content from other users. A world of endless possibilities awaits you.

#### **SPACE MARINE**

What began as a Gears of War-ish game has bloomed into something quite special. It's also Relic's secondever venture outside of the RTS safe zone, so expect some pretty awesome stuff from this action/RPG/tactics game set within the captivating Warhammer 40K universe.

#### METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING

Gone is "Tactical Espionage Action", and in with the "Lightning Bolt Action". You play as half-robot halfandrogynous prettyboy Raiden. No details about the plot, or setting, or much of anything yet.

#### COMMAND & CONQUER 4: **TIBERIAN TWILIGHT**

It's different, and we can't get enough of it. With the multiplayer Beta in full swing, it's become clear just how different C&C4 is to its predecessors. It might not be the sequel everyone was hoping for, but gosh, it's good to play something that's not afraid to be different.

#### **SUPREME COMMANDER 2**

It wasn't for everyone, but Supreme Commander brought its own unique style (along with some unique concepts) to the RTS table. Huge maps, huge units and ridiculously long build times - they made the first special and we're expecting the same, but better, from the sequel. (We're sure more hot titles will be announced during 2010, so stick with us for the big scoops. Later.) NAG **Developer→** EA Los Angeles **Publisher→** Electronic Arts **Web→** www.commandandconquer.com **Release Date→** March 2010



## Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight

It's C&C, but NOD as you know it...

**Genre→** Real-Time Strategy

#### THE WRATH OF KANE

Commander Jenkins here. These are the battle reports of our Special Operations Division (SOD for short). No, hang on - don't we always do pseudo-militant commander reports when writing about strategy games? It's always commander this and general that and private parts whatnots. We're not sure how this all started but that is how it has always been, and the thing with things that have always been is that they must be left to be as they are.

But that's not what we're going to be doing here, because that's not what Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight does.

Long story short, NAG was given 3 multiplayer beta keys for Command & Conquer 4 (not IV). We've been playing for the last few days and are about to start a match now that we're going to write about in a Bounce Between Writers Format™ (BBWF™). Try and keep up with the acronyms people...

Dane: Alright - where to begin? Everything you know about Command & Conquer: forget it. Except Kane, because he's still in there. And GDI and NOD, because they're still in there. And Tiberium, because that's still in there. Sort of. Here's what's happening - things are changing, yo [okay, that'll be enough of that, Ed]. What the developers of the game have opted to do is remove conventional bases and traditional resource gathering from the equation and replace them with a persistent-stats based system. Basically, in every multiplayer game you're given









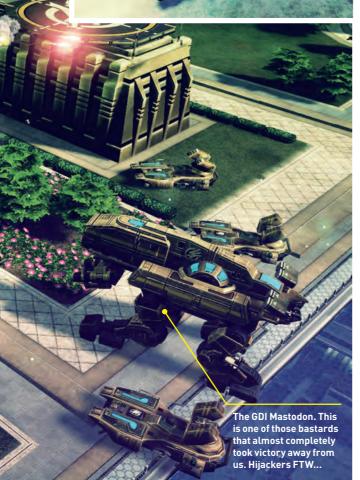
# "Michael's making some sort of panicked noise at the top of the map, but as usual, we don't really pay attention."

a crawler, from which you'll be building all of your units. Except you don't have all your units to begin with - a whole heap of the tech tree is locked when you begin your multiplayer career (unless you've unlocked new stuff by playing single player) and it'll stay that way until you earn enough experience (unlocked by killing enemy dudes, keeping your dudes alive and doing favours for your teammates) to increase your rank. At rank one when playing as NOD, for example, you've got access to basic tier one units like Scorpion Tanks and Attack Bikes, as well as an accuracy upgrade that you can purchase in your upgrades tab, basic defensive buildings that you can build (when playing Defence) and low-level support powers that you can use (when playing Support) - but that's it. To unlock new units, tech tiers, upgrades, defensive buildings and support powers, you've got to play some games. Get enough XP and you'll rank up, meaning you'll get some new toys. It's kind of like the Call of Duty of RTS games. Think about everything that was just said and consider the amount of courage it took, both from the developers and EA, to put something like this out there at the risk of alienating their entire fan base. A **lot** of fans of the series are going to hate this, but what we say to that is: don't be a whiny b\*tch. If you want traditional C&C, play C&C 3, because that's still an amazing game and is a traditional RTS. If you want something completely different and unique, join us in this peek into a game that dares to try something new.

Michael: We started a 3V3 against 3 random Internet people as NOD (we always hope for noobs so we can dominate them and bag maximum XP). Each of us assumes a different role

[Geoff - hotdog roll, Michael - hamburger bun and Dane - a Portuguese roll) also known as Support, Defence and Offence. Okay, the roll thing is going nowhere so you can ignore it. Dane on Offence, Geoff on Support and I'm on Defence (we had to flip a coin and draw straws to decide this). The game starts and we each have a Crawler - not sure why they're called Crawlers because they walk, roll and fly - no crawling. As Defence (rolls on tracks) my plan was to move my Crawler up to capture point 1 (see the map) and just park it there and pump out defensive structures and units. The thing with Defence is that you get two sets of things to play with - buildings and units. The amount of buildings is limited to power points - essentially if you simply must build buildings or you can't play Command & Conquer without a "base" then pick the Defence class. It's not exactly "base building" but it should be a nice bridging class until you shed your preconceived notions and nostalgic clinging to previous Command & Conquer games.

Geoff: As support, my Crawler is airborne, so I fly over to capture point number 4 while Dane heads straight over to 5 (a highly contested point close to the enemy deployment zone). I queue up a few Cobras (flying units good against tanks) that pop out of the door as soon as my crawler deploys, which I send over to help Dane, as I notice he's up against two enemy Crawlers (one defence and the other offence) also vying for point 5. My Cobras get there just in time for Dane to plop his crawler down in a kind of "bring it, bitches" stance. The enemies start pouring out units but we've just managed to squeeze in before them, giving us the advantage. Michael is busy saying



something about pot plants, but we're too busy admiring how well we're doing to take notice.

Dane: See, you can queue units while your Crawler is packed up and moving, but they'll only deploy when you unpack your Crawler (which is essentially an MCV, if all this is confusing you). So as I'm making my mad dash deep into enemy territory to grab point 5 and fly NOD's flag high, I start queueing up a bunch of Avenger tanks (good against other tanks) and light vehicles (Raiders and Attack Bikes - good against infantry/light units and air respectively). On my way to 5, we spot two enemy Crawlers basically already set up at 5. I panic a little bit, but I push on. I get there just before they do, unpack my junk and start punching the enemy in the teeth with huge bullets. I feel it's important to note that my bullets are bigger than Michael's and Geoff's, because I'm clearly a better player than they are. Better player = bigger bullets. Makes sense, right? Michael's screaming something about them stealing all the Tiberium pot plants. We're not sure what he's on about really, so we ignore him.

Michael: Pot plants! They're stealing the pot plants. When I started this game I immediately queued a bunch of Engineers (around 6) and 3 of each type of building (Bunker, Viper Turret and Rocket Pod). When I got to capture point 1, I planted my Crawler and started sending the

Engineers around the map to capture other control points and to start gathering Tiberium 'pot plants'. The enemy also had this plan and started stealing the blue pots (green gets you 1 upgrade point and blue 2 points). The pot plants allow you to upgrade things like rate of fire, movement and unlock higher tiers of technology. So, they're very important, hence me shouting, "they're stealing the pot plants". Dane and Geoff were too busy to help/ didn't hear/who knows...? This almost proved to be our undoing.

Geoff: Dane and I continue to hammer back the opposition, safe in the knowledge that we're totally awesome and will never lose point 5. Until these very large, very scary tier 3 units called Mastodons decide to come and trample through our apparently secure defences. They wipe out Dane's Crawler, which I decide is an excellent cue for me to GTFO and retreat back to point 4. Dane cries when his Crawler goes out in a blaze of glory, while I get to work rebuilding my army to hold down point 4. Except, the enemy's Mastodons (accompanied by a side dish of light infantry and a handful of Engineers to provide a constant stream of repair beams) don't just stop at point 5, and come crashing through to 4 as well (Dane tries to warn me with screams of "they're coming your way!", but I'm too wrapped up in basic survival to take heed). I consequently get wiped out and thrown into the longest 20 seconds of my



"I never stood a chance **because I** was between armies at that point."









Dane: We should've listened to Michael. While those dudes were grabbing Tib pot plants all over the map and researching millions of helpful upgrades (including reaching tech tier two and three), we were trapped in tier one, gleefully assuming we had the upper hand. Then... Well, then I lost my Crawler. As Geoff said, its exit was glorious, but incredibly surprising considering how much ass we'd been kicking up to that point. Damn Mastodons! They push to point 4 and we're forced to try and hold them off from within our main base/deployment zone. We're getting torn apart something fierce here as these Mastodons take a stroll through our once impressive, now devastated deployment zone. It doesn't help that these particular Mastodons are completely maxed out in terms of rank (units gain rank by killing stuff and picking up green and blue Tiberium crates - green to increase a unit's rank, together with health and damage, and blue to upgrade its abilities/weapons). They're basically huge, metal 'roid monkeys with big guns - like Arnold Schwarzenegger in Terminator, only scarier. Michael doesn't seem to be having much trouble - he's grabbing Tib pot plants from all over the map while we fight for our digital lives. We whine a bit, Michael says, "I told you so", and then Geoff suddenly has the most welltimed lightbulb moment in history...

Michael: Now, while all of this fighting is going on without me, I've grabbed enough pot plants to max out my upgrade tree (or so I thought) so I stop collecting them (forgetting Dane is a few ranks above me and will need more). You see, it's a chore to do in the beginning when there's loads to keep track of, but I know how important it is. By now I've maxed out my allocation of power points and I can't build anymore turrets and stuff so I start working on ways to pester the bad guy's plans. I don't usually play Defence so I'm not clued on all the various rock/paper/ scissors combinations and counters. So I pick the unit furtherest along the build list - the Centurion. The idea is to build 5 Centurions and some Engineers to heal them and take the whole lot on a tour of the map, killing and maiming as I go. But first... Because I'm at capture point number 1 there are Tiberium Cores (crates) to the left and the right of during battles but this way you don't run the risk of losing a unit). I send the Centurions backwards and forwards until they're maxed out. The plan now is to send them down and right to capture point 3 - behind the enemy lines. NOD needs to be sneaky to win. Then Dane asks why I'm not collecting pots anymore. Oops.

Geoff: Support players are all about messing with the enemy. I can lay down support powers like mine fields, Obelisks of Life (the healing version of their more destructive brothers) and cloaking fields, but as a result my units are less useful in a general sense. Thankfully, I have one particular unit that I unlocked recently - the Hijacker. This funny-looking, longhaired little guy can take over any enemy vehicle in a matter of seconds. I pop out five quickly (training units while in your deployment zone or captured uplink zone gives you a big speed boost) and call for a distraction. Dane answers with a group of Scorpion Tanks and it's off we go. While his Scorpions draw enemy fire, I send my Hijackers straight to the Mastodons and, much to our surprise, manage to capture three of the four. We quickly take down the remaining guy and easily wipe out his supporting troops. I then bring along an Engineer to pick up the lifeless husk left behind, to bring my total number of stolen Mastodons to four. Our victory points are about equal with the opponent's at this time, which is just no good. Dane and I pick up our newly reinforced army and get ready to take back every damn capture point, building and Tib Well on the map. I train up some Tyrants, which are heavy tanks capable of burrowing and moving about underground - perfect for taking that lonely capture point 3. Michael's making some sort of panicked noise at the top of the map, but as usual, we don't really pay attention.

Dane: At this point, we're sitting on about 2000 points of the 2500 we need. Let me explain, because you're probably pretty confused right about now. The beta only offers one game mode: domination. In this mode, the map is littered with points [well 5 really, Ed] that players can capture. Capture more points than your enemy and you'll start earning points towards victory (there are also structures like artillery turrets and mutant hovels that can be

# "...like flying Arnold Schwarzeneggers."









captured, but they don't influence your victory points). Hit the cap and you win at being awesome. It's kind of like Dawn of War, but with Scorpion Tanks. But back to the game, the enemy briefly started catching up with us with their stunning use of Mastodon hax, but we're now back on track since we started beating the hell out of the enemy with their own units. I lock down point 5 with a mixed bunch of units and I don't plan on moving again soon - I'm going to be at point 5 'til the victory music starts playing.

Michael: Again, while all the chaos was happening at the bottom of the map I was left alone to max out my Centurions. I was starting to feel a little left out  $\leftarrow$  sniff $\rightarrow$  and jealous. I suspect the enemy saw all the defences and left me alone. I was also now collecting pots like mad for Dane's upgrades [which I barely used - Dane].

Eventually the Centurions were ready to fight and I sent them down to 3. They lasted long enough but because I was fighting against units that weren't vulnerable to the Centurions they all died rather quicly. So... it's still important to make sure you take the right tools to every battle in this game. The nice thing about this new way of playing is that you can quickly and easily adapt your strategy at any point in the game without a huge hassle. It's not a major problem if everything you have is wiped out because it means you had the wrong units to start with and can now build ones that will work

So, all the Centurions are dead and now the hornets nest I stirred up at 3 came for revenge. I'm hearing that there are problems with the Mastodons down below, so I find one and click on it to find out which units can kill it easily - yes it's that easy (there's a box in the bottom left of the unit details that tells you which units are best for the job). Apparently Reapers are the best for killing Mastodons – I start making them exclusively. By this stage the enemy Support player cruised through my base with a fleet of Kodiaks (think flying Arnold Schwarzeneggers) and took out my base and all the buildings. I never stood a chance because I was between armies at that point. My Crawler died...;(

My end game looked like this: At this stage with all my buildings gone and the game close to ending, I was only able to scramble some units together to help Dane and Geoff. My new Crawler arrived in the main base and I only built Reapers to deal with the Kodiaks. I had what I counted to be at least over 1 million of them and bravely sent them to help the battle for control point 2. I got there and they all died in what seemed like one or two shots. I went WTF. The game ended soon afterwards and we won.

Even though I was playing the (boring) Defence class, I still had fun doing my own thing – it was obvious after the fight, when we all compared notes outside, that I missed all the real action in this particular game.

If you're prepared to try something new and exciting when it comes to RTS games then get yourself a copy of this when it arrives in March. If you're hoping for some good old C&C, you're not going to find it here. NAG

> Dane Remendes Geoff Burrows Michael James







**AVAILABLE MARCH 2010** 





\*Vulletive

















# Heavy Rain

Don't forget your brolly

**Genre→** Interactive film

**HANDS ON** 

360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

**QUANTIC DREAM IS A** development studio that's not afraid to grab the industry by the tender bits and squeeze. Their first release, Omikron: The Nomad Soul. was an adventure game that combined elements from a variety of genres, threw in a good helping of David Bowie, was stirred with a crazy spoon and then spat out at the industry with a sort of "here is our weird game, you probably won't get it, but it means a lot to us" attitude. Many didn't get it, but those who did were blown away by its originality, presentation and just plain kookiness. Their next title, Fahrenheit, wasn't quite as wacky as Nomad Soul, but nonetheless broke through many traditions of the adventure genre - in fact, Quantic denies that it's an adventure game, instead insistent that one calls it an interactive film. Its emphasis on story, powerful character development and (many would say excessive) use of quick time events (QTEs) once again had the public on the fence, but most who played it agree that Fahrenheit was a fine piece of work, one thoroughly deserving of a sequel. That's where Heavy Rain comes in - part spiritual sequel, part attempt to win over the stoic few who still think Quantic is iust a bunch of self-obsessed nut jobs. Whatever you think of the idea of Heavy Rain, you owe it to yourself to at least have a bash at it; the demo should be available on PSN by time you read this. The game's story is divided among the lives of four individuals. These aren't super ass-kicking action heroes; they're just people trying to make it through life however they can. As you

# Looking Good

Since the early days of development, creator/director David Cage has been adamant that Heavy Rain would work on no console but the PS3, although he sometimes tames that statement by saying that the game is betterserved by Quantic only working on a single platform, in terms of the control that they have over the gameplay experience. Despite the lumps of money that SCE has thrown at the project to ensure the first claim holds true, it's clear that this title sets a had just been set with Uncharted 2. It's one thing for me to harp on about how incredibly realistic the visuals are in this game, but you really do aspect of the game looks fantastic: the lighting, the textures, the models. the animation, the visual effects, the Not one part of it has been left behind, anything else I've seen so far















Heavy Rain looks like it'll add to the steadilygrowing list of "must have" PS3 exclusives. and should not be neglected by any PS3 owner looking for a mature, engrossing adventure game "interactive film".

progress through the story, you'll alternate control over these characters and drive them through their lives, from the most mundane activities to intense action scenes. Mentioning practically anything about the story would detract from the experience of playing it, but here's the basic outline of what's going on in the world of Heavy Rain: There's a serial killer on the loose; police are calling him the Origami Killer. He's been capturing and murdering children, and leaves their bodies in easy-to-spot locations three to five days after the abduction, with an origami object in their hand and an orchid on their chest. Two of the playable characters – FBI

agent Norman Jayden and private investigator Scott Shelby - are on the case to catch the killer. The involvement of the remaining two characters is best left to mystery.

During our couple of hours with the already incredibly polished preview code, it's clear that Quantic Dream has taken every drop of criticism for Fahrenheit to heart. Heavy Rain looks like it'll add to the steadily-growing list of "must have" PS3 exclusives, and if the quality of this early version of the game is anything to go by, should not be neglected by any PS3 owner looking for a mature, engrossing adventure game "interactive film". NAG

**Geoff Burrows** 

# Control Freak

Perhaps one of the biggest points of contention for those who played Fahrenheit was the game's control system. Dominated by QTEs for everything from fight scenes to dialoque, the game demanded quick reaction times and attentiveness throughout. Heavy Rain adopts this same system, but does it all a little smoother, and the button presses are even more representative of Dialogue sees a number of possible character's head, with their legibility tied directly to the character's mental condition at the time. There's also the fantastic idea of a thought-based hint system. Simply hold down L2 at any time to see a number of topics currently clouding the character's mind, and press the corresponding key to hear a delightfully film noir-esque monologue.

New to *Heavy Rain*, courtesy of the PS3's SIXAXIS technology is the requirement to shake, swing or otherwise swoop your controller in the required manner. It's a little silly is brushing his teeth or shaking up a bottle of orange juice, but our impressions so far lead us to believe this is part of David Cage's whole design philosophy, and the reason why you shouldn't be surprised to find sex, nudity and some pretty hardcore violence in this game – everything is designed with a purpose, and nothing is gratuitous. If something happens in real life, it can happen in Heavy Rain.

or sex become gratuitous, it doesn't it's sex for the sake of sex, violence in real life when two adults fall in love they may end up making love? That's the kind of thing that happens. Why not in a game? Why should it be treated differently? I'm doing a game that will be rated 18+. What should I hide when I'm rated that way?



# The Reviewers

Our regular Reviewer List Writer is still dead: here's your Gamer Horoscope (Science Approved!) for March 2010.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 18) Happy Birthday! Your needs and ambitions are important to screw everyone else. If they think you're selfish, don't worry. They'll be dead

Pisces (February 19 - March 20) This is the time of the year that you are at your lowest point, mentally and physically. Just remember, Muad'Dib.

Aries (March 21 - April 19) Important month for you. Fix the network in your house. Friends may give you games you're unfamiliar with. Get new friends.

# Taurus (April 20 - May 21)

Income opportunities will arrive in your inbox. Quit your job and become a game tester. Start writing a book. Your

# Gemini (May 22 - June 21)

Think about learning a new programming language. You could profit by writing legal software. If you're bored at work, play flash games

# Cancer (June 22 - July 22)

surgery. Your lovers or children will hate you because you're poor. Buy

### Leo (July 23 - August 23)

Join a clan or guild. This is a good month to spend more time with your partner, but don't sign any papers. Farm for Achievements on Xbox 360.

Virgo (August 24 - September 22) Working with new technology may play a role in the month ahead. Grow an extra pair of hands. You will retain more water than usual.

Libra (September 23 - October 23) You have an edge on dating, true love and adventure this month. Don't cut yourself. Express yourself and your competitive nature. Grow a pair.

Scorpio (October 24 - November 22) Something about your home or family will be important this month. You may get into an argument with family. Expect bad luck on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

# Sagittarius (November 23 - December

Your planets are gathering in your 3<sup>rd</sup> house of communicating, ideas and relatives. They will overstay their welcome. Your car will break.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 20) Consider your value in life. A benevolent Jupiter is at a beneficial angle to Pluto, which means you might

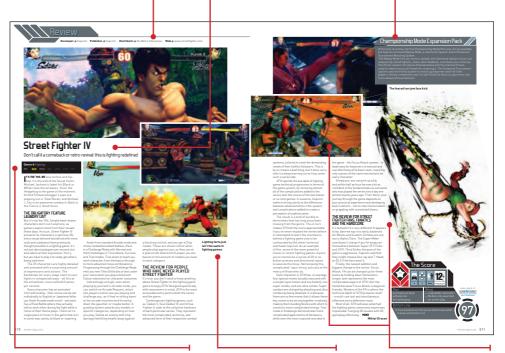
# Anatomy of a Review

A guick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

GAME NAME: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. Now it comes with a short summary, too!

BOX OUTS: More good stuff. Just in a box.



GENRE AND PLATFORMS: What kind of game is it, and what platforms does it come on. All available platforms are in white, the one we reviewed it on is in vellow.

CAPTIONS: A picture's worth a thousand words. Here's 20 or so..

**SCREENSHOTS AND** ARTWORK: The game looks something like this, presumably

# The Score

# Breaking down the box

AWARD: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

**MULTIPLAYER ICONS:** How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

PLUS/MINUS: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

THE BOTTOM LINE: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard..

AGE RATING: Let's see some ID, son

> SCORE: Further reducing our bottom line to a number out of 100

- + Simple yet deep + Balanced
- Lacks better instructionMedals only awarded

# Bottom Line

A true evolution for the series that knows what to keep and what to cut.



### **Editor's Choice** Award

If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right - pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.



# **Must Play Award**

Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note



# **Pony Award**

This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich We keep it only for the best garbage



# What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing in the NAG office

# **GAME NAME**

- Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- Command & Conquer 4 Beta
- Mass Effect 2
- 4 Batman: Arkham Asylum
- Super Street Figher IV
- X-COM Complete Pack 6
- Army of Two: 40th Day
- 8
- Battlefield: Bad Company 2 Beta
- 10 Bayonetta
- BioShock 2 11
- Dante's Inferno
- 13 Darksiders
- 14 Machinarium
- 15 Mass Effect
- Need for Speed: Shift
- 17 Plants vs. Zombies
- 18 Poker
- 19 Star Trek Online
- Zen of Sudoku

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# Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

# ARMY OF TWO: THE 40TH DAY



### DARK VOID



### DARKSIDERS



# MASS EFFECT 2







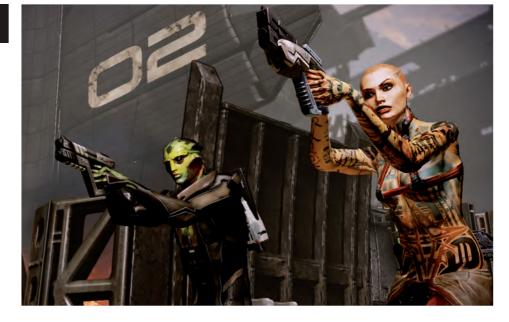
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Genre→ Action RPG PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THE YEAR IS 2183, and just a few weeks have passed since all that other stuff (see: Mass Effect) happened. After pretty much single-handedly saving pretty much the entire universe and everything, Commander Shepard is out on space patrol duty. Yes, that's still Commander Shepard. The guy didn't even get a promotion. Apparently pretty much single-handedly saving pretty much the entire universe is its own reward or something, and it's straight back to business as usual for the Normandy. Of course, when "business as usual" mostly involves saving pretty much the entire universe, it's really only a matter of calculable inevitability that Shepard quickly finds himself in another one of those save-prettymuch-the-entire-universe scenarios. It's just another day at the office.

Now, those of you who haven't already played Mass Effect, go do that. For everyone else then in the meantime, it's probably the industry's worse-kept secret that Commander Shepard gets himself dead at the start of Mass Effect 2, but makes an otherwise extremely improbable return from this inconvenient death to win the game anyway. I'd make some glib little joke about zombie messiahs and humanity's salvation, but someone would write and complain to Michael. Nonetheless, Shepard's resurrection and post-posthumous employment by shady pro-human organisation Cerberus and the even shadier "Illusive Man" (or "He sounds like Martin Sheen, oh he is Martin Sheen, I can't think of him as the Illusive Man



anymore now, OMG it's Martin Sheen") does make for a most intriguing narrative context. Basically, Shepard's now working for what seem to be (probably are) some really unscrupulous people, and for what might be (probably is) a really unscrupulous cause. Moral, ethical, and political ambiguity on this sort of scale is guite unprecedented in gaming, and the question "But am I doing the right thing here?" is always tugging suspicion somewhere nearby.

Just as in the first game, however, that's a question left entirely up to the player to decide. Despite being somewhat too binary at times, the game's Paragon / Renegade meter system usually leaves

enough space to play with unpredictability and impulsive action. Because they don't cancel each other out, an otherwise exemplary Paragon character can still choose to do something reckless or thuggish from time to time without losing any of the goody-goody stuff, and I can't think of any other game that lets players do this. It might seem an insignificant point to people who play extremist characters, but I always think it's the really erratic guy in between who's the most interesting. Sure, he'll help out these troubled colonists over here, but maybe he'll sell them all into an off world black market medical testing scheme later on. He's interesting like that.





# I'm going to stop you right th-

Mass Effect 2's Paragon / Renegade system has a brilliant new feature – you can now interrupt conversations just like a real person with no regard for social propriety. From time to time, an opportunity will present itself where action really does speak louder than boring old words. A Paragon or Renegade you'll be given a chance to respond appropriately. This included punching appropriates). This integrated by participant as woman in the face at least once (technically twice, because I reloaded to do it all over again for a laugh). This brings my Shepard's punching-women-in-the-face career total to three. Hat trick!

But where the morality system is mostly the same, the rest of Mass Effect 2 is fundamentally changed from its predecessor. The same six classes are present, but their skill sets have been rebuilt, rebalanced, and streamlined. Playing as an Infiltrator now, for example, means tactical cloaking and being able to use a sniper rifle properly from the start because, actually, an Infiltrator should probably be able to use a sniper rifle properly once they've graduated from the System Alliance Military academy. There's a new regenerating health and shielding mechanism, and restoring fallen comrades in combat is now bound to a classless Unity tech ability. Offsetting what might seem to be a simplification in this area, perhaps, is the controversial introduction of limited ammunition. Apparently in the two weeks since everything went down in Mass Effect, everybody totally forgot how to make guns shoot indefinitely. Bad timing, really, since the universe is now trembling on the very precipice of a terminator holocaust and everything. Enemies do tend to drop ammo (okay, thermal clips, BioWare's way of saying "ammo" without saying "ammo") regularly enough that shortage isn't much of an issue unless you're playing on the

harder difficulties and/or you suck at shooting stuff. So why the change in the first place? Well, I don't know.

I also don't know why they're now forcing players to buy fuel for the Normandy. Yes, I get it - real spaceships burn fuel. I'll also point that that the Normandy isn't a real spaceship, and that everything else in the game isn't real either. What's even more perplexing is the internal inconsistency with this decision - flying the Normandy within a single system doesn't burn fuel, but travelling between star clusters does. What, is the Normandy just floating on solar winds the rest of the time? The only reason for buying fuel, it seems, is to spend credits.

Then there's the immensely dreary resource mining. It's arguably better than hauling the Mako across interminable cut-and-pasted grey planetscapes, but that's a bit like saying being stabbed in the back is better than being stabbed in the head. It's still being stabbed either way. There's a Normandy ship upgrade available some way into the game that mitigates the process somewhat, but it's still a \*\*\*\*ing chore. There are the only real problems with the game, however, and they're mostly negligible. They're also completely eclipsed by the overwhelming



# With great power comes great... consequences

It's old news that you can import your original *Mass Effect* game-ended characters into the sequel with their plot points intact, but it's a lot less gimmicky that you'd expect. Characters in Mass Effect 2 will occasionally reference events exactly as you played them previously, and some new situations can arise – o

not - as a direct consequence of these. It's obvious enough to matter, but subtle enough to escape contrivance. Not only does this clever continuity lend a sort of organic credibility to any current events, but it's also going to inform every substantial decision you have to make the time around. Everything counts.



# And remember, respect is everything

Much of Mass Effect 2 involves recruiting a spec ops team to take with you into the finale. Once they're onboard the Normandy, you'll be able to develop relationships with these characters, and in time, you'll be asked to do something special for them. I'll be deliberately vague here, but you probably (really, definitely) won't want to skip these. Completing these otherwise entirely optional missions will ensure that team member's loyalty to your command, and that's going to be - coughcough - important - coughcough - later on.
Also, you can't have hot space sex with any character that isn't loyal. My work here is done.









At the risk of sounding outrageously hyperbolic, Mass Effect 2's story and character presentation is the finest I've ever seen in any game, ever ever. If you could cram all the good bits of Battlestar Galactica, Richard Morgan's complete back catalogue, and all the overbearing, ill-gotten hubris of humanity in the deep, vast cold of space into one game, it would be something like this. It's smart, sophisticated, confident, thoroughly engrossing, and almost impossible to put down once you're in it. I usually prefer to avoid vapid superlatives like "the next level", but Mass Effect 2 truly is a monument to This Whole Game Thing Done Properly. Conventional RPG stuffing like stats and points and other meaningless numbers are substituted here with the real thing - a story and characters you'll actually care about. I won't elaborate any further lest I inadvertently reveal that Miranda is really a man, but there are moments in Mass Effect 2 that will stay with you for a long time. After nearly 40 hours over three days, I felt almost shellshocked reconnecting to this

drab reality with no spaceships and

aliens and desperate moral quandaries in the bleak face of total extinction. Then I started a new game.

With no risk whatsoever of outrageous hyperbole, I think Mass Effect 3 is going to be BioWare's most important game ever. Topping this one is going to be a hard job, and everyone's going to expect them to do it. And I can't wait to see what happens next. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl



# Bottom Line

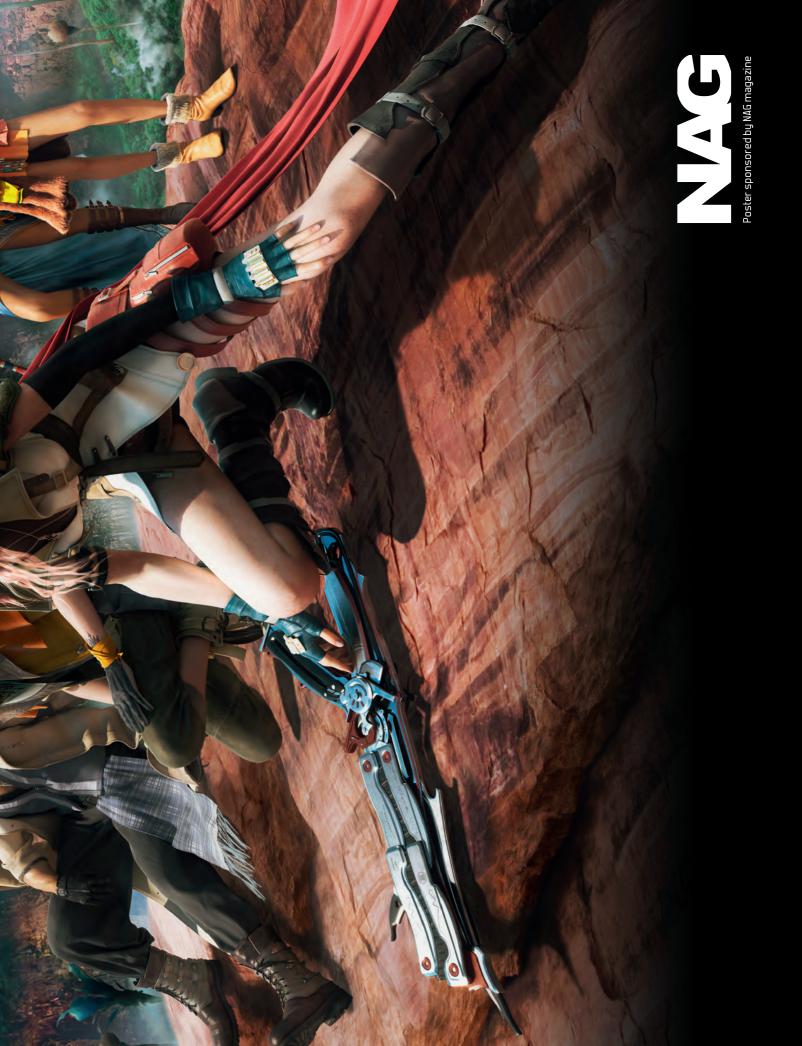


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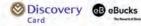
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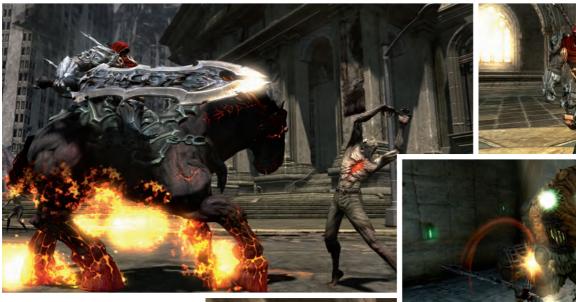






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# **Darksiders**

The Seventh Seal was not broken!

Genre→ Third-Person Action Adventure 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP D

AVE YOU EVER SAT around discussing random stuff with your mates and had the conversation gravitate towards the Wouldn't It Be Cool If™ series of scenarios that always inevitably seem to pop up? You know, the "wouldn't it be cool if we found rivers of chunky, red peanut butter on Mars" and the "wouldn't it be cool if we had nuclear-powered kettles" line of conversation. How often has that thinking been applied to games in a "wouldn't it be cool if someone made a game with the first-person shooter action of Quake, but latched onto that the farm-sim elements of Harvest Moon - so you're shooting dudes, but also planting turnips and raising cows" sort of way? Darksiders is quite possibly the result of a conversation that was rife with the aforementioned shenanigans, except that instead of simply staring blankly at the sky and imagining the possibilities, this particular group of mates actually went ahead and did something with their cool combination of different concepts.

If you've happened to brave the dangerous waters of the Internet recently to find out more about Darksiders, chances are vou've seen a few cries of "OMG derivative!" floating about in that place of questionable social value. Here's the thing – a game can be derivative and still rock the hell out of you. That's exactly what Darksiders does. It borrows the best bits of a number of games we've played before and combines them to create something wholly awesome. A bunch of games, including Legend of Zelda, God of War and even Portal (although apparently the developers, Vigil

Pedigree was founded by Joe Madureira and David Adams. *Darksiders* is the studio's first title, but they're currently developing a *Warhammer* 40,000 MMO.

Games, thought of using a portal guntype mechanic long before Portal was released) have had their best elements shoved into Darksiders. While it doesn't really improve on the standards set by the games it borrows from, it's the complete package that is special.

In Darksiders, you're War: one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. War's set to ride out to herald the apocalypse when those awesome Seals (from the Bible - go read up on it in the Book of Revelation if you want more info) are broken. So when the time comes for War to head out, he rocks up on Earth to find the place in turmoil - heaven and hell are at war, demons are tackling helicopters, angels are tackling demons, babies are exploding and the Third Kingdom (the Kingdom of Mankind) is pretty much being obliterated. It's just what you'd

expect from the apocalypse: except it's come too early. The Seventh Seal was not broken and the blame for this huge mess is placed on War. He's stripped of his powers and put in the corner to think about what he's done. 100 years pass in the blink of a cutscene and War's given a chance to redeem himself by proving to The Charred Council (who ensure that the laws of the apocalypse are upheld and that heaven and hell don't interrupt the balance) that he's been framed. So you're sent back to earth together with The Watcher (brilliantly voiced by Mark Hamill), who has been bound to War and now keeps the Horseman on a very tight leash to ensure he doesn't defy the will of the Council. Things on earth have only gotten worse. Skirmishes between angels and demons are commonplace, the balance has been shattered and the

human population are now zombies.

This is where the gameplay kicks in. At its core, the game plays very much like most Legend of Zelda titles, with a splash of God of Warthrown in. The combat system is pretty standard - one button handles all of your attacks with Chaoseater (War's gigantic sword), one button handles attacks with secondary weapons (like Death's scythe), one button dodges/blocks/counters and another lets you use ranged attacks (or other items). War's also got a bunch of special abilities (called Wrath abilities) that he can activate during combat. The combat itself (while it's not as advanced, as deep or as fluid as that of a title like Bayonetta) works incredibly well, flows nicely and is easy to get the hang of. This is mostly thanks to the control system, which the developers clearly put some thought into. Killing enemies (and destroying certain environmental objects) rewards you with souls of varying colours blue souls are currency (used to buy items, abilities and upgrades from a demonic merchant named Vulgrim), yellow souls build up your Wrath meter (used to activate Wrath abilities) and green souls up your health when it's been pummelled away by angry things. Weapons can be customised by visiting the forge menu to assign buffs to them. These buffs range from extra souls gained when killing enemies to restoring your health when you deal damage. The enemies in the game are a nasty bunch (particularly the bosses) and the art style of Joe Madureira (comic book artist turned game developer) shines through in the environment, the enemies and basically just the entire game.

When you're not slashing at things, you'll be introduced to the game's









# Keep it secret. Keep it safe.

Darksiders rewards exploration. There's a bunch of stuff scattered around the game world (which you can travel through at your leisure) for you to find if you look hard enough. You can increase your maximum health and Wrath by finding lifestone shards and Wrath cores, for example. The thing is, you'll have to do lots of backtracking to find every little secret stash in the game, because you won't be able to fully traverse the environment until you've regained War's lost powers, abilities and items. Your reward for all this is that you'll basically be more awesome and able to kill stuff more efficiently.



adventurous side, which is filled with puzzles, platforming and puzzle platforming. War's quite a limber bloke, probably able to hold his own in acrobatic contests against the Lara Crofts and Nathan Drakes of the world – which is pretty impressive, considering the amount of armour this dude wears. Later on, you get access to Ruin, War's (flaming!) horse, which can be summoned in certain areas to help you get around quicker. You'll also do more damage with Chaoseater when riding Ruin and the extra mobility/speed he provides comes in useful when fighting/running away from certain bosses

That's Darksiders in a nutshell. It's

a great (and fun) game, with a solid combat system and adventure elements that will frustrate you (as the adventure elements of any good game should), but ultimately keep you coming back for more. Joe Madureira's amazing artwork and creative flair complement the gameplay wonderfully. The game is just really well presented and incredibly polished - but be warned, it can get a bit repetitive at times. It's a fantastic first game for Vigil and we're looking forward to see what they can conjure up next. We had (unreasonably) high expectations for this game, but they've delivered the goods. Play Darksiders. NAG

**Dane Remendes** 



- + Addictive adventure elements

Darksiders, while it's not particularly original is highly polished, well presented, filled with style and is a ton of fun to play.











# Army of Two: The 40th Day

Things to do in Shanghai when you're aggro

Genre→ Third Person Shooter PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**THE FIRST ARMY OF** Two game was something special. Sure, it had its problems, but the whole idea was a rather sweet one, largely because it pushed the idea of co-operative gaming, raising it from a sidelined option and turning it into a central theme. Just to qualify why that's a good thing... not everyone enjoys competitive multiplayer gaming. Some of us enjoy co-op far too much, and so a game that downplays competition and underlines co-operation is a treat - which is pretty much what the first game was. It has been played through several times by me, both in single player mode and with a friend. So, when the second game arrived. I was understandably excited.

Fans of the first game will find that Army of Two: The 40th Day is something of a mixed bag. The developers sorted out a number of the issues from the first game - most notably the AI - but managed to lose a few elements that made the original great along the way.

The second game sees the characters from the first game (Salem and Rios) on a mission in Shanghai. It's a simple mission for which they are being paid good money - yes, the task is as fishy as it sounds. As soon as the mission ends, all hell breaks loose. Shanghai undergoes a large scale attack from an unknown enemy, dumping the city into chaos and ruins. Salem and Rios don't need to get to the bottom of it... they just need to get out. The player embarks on a journey through the shattered streets of Shanghai, moving through alleyways,



collapsing buildings (including a surprise visit to the South African embassy) a decimated zoo and more.

The game feels a lot longer than the first, which is good, but the setting is not quite as varied as those offered by the original. Sure, there are lots of different environments that the duo moves through, but it's all based on the 'city under siege' theme. In the first game, we got to see jungles, cities, corporate offices... even an aircraft carrier. Not so this time around. The lack of globe trotting is exacerbated by the fact that everything feels incredibly gloomy and dreary. Sure, people whose city is being blown to bits are hardly going to be running a conga-line down the main street, but still. It gets pretty depressing.

It looks good, though - the graphics have been upped a notch or two,

resulting in a very pretty game (if you can call the setting pretty.) Likewise, the sound is also excellent, with great voice acting supporting the bangs, booms and cracks of urban battle. There are a few notably funny quips thrown out, but not as many as in the first instalment. Perhaps life as mercenaries has made Salem and Rios a hit more serious

The battles are chaotic and often protracted. When playing with a friend, it's a good idea to use decent tactics. There is no room for Rambo in this game - enemies come from all sides. and they're smart enough to use cover and flanking tactics. That means the players need to stick together and, more importantly, work together. The co-operation within the game has been broadened, though, meaning that some missions will see the characters separated, but still working together. It's a nice idea - one guy running around cleaning things up while another snipes from a distance provides a very decent co-op experience, as an example.

If you're not playing with a living, breathing friend, you'll be making use of the partner Al. This is one of the fields that have been greatly improved. The AI partner will search out cover far more effectively, and will generally target enemies well - and remove them from the world of the living rather efficiently. The partner AI also uses the buddy-rescue system more effectively. The player will have fewer cheap deaths, waiting for an Al partner that is

hooked up on a stupid piece of scenery, or can't find cover in order to heal the downed fighter. But there are still a few cheap deaths to be had. The Al is not quite perfect, and will sometimes make really silly mistakes. These are very occasional, and the single player who manages his AI partner effectively may never see them at all.

The weapon upgrade system has also been given an overhaul. The player can import weapons unlocked in the previous game, which is a nice touch. Weapons in the new game can be bought and upgraded at virtually any time during play. The upgrade system allows for greater versatility and variance, at the expense of realism. The player can slap any combination of barrels, stocks and bodies together... but putting an M40 barrel on an AK47 just can't happen in the real world (at least not without a massive weapon-smith workshop and lots of technical know-how.) Still, it's a nice system, and the weapons feel more individualised than before... particularly if you opt for a leopard skin finish, or











something equally kitsch.

The game is built for multiplayer, which results in one of the biggest bugbears the title has to offer - for South African Xbox players, at least. There is no system link option included. That means your multiplayer gaming is confined to split-screen or online coop. That's fine and well in countries that have plentiful broadband access and Xhox Live services. Not so fine here at the Southern tip of the Dark Continent.

In the end, Army of Two: The 40th Day is a satisfying, if slightly flawed experience. The new choice system, which forces players to make hard decisions and alters the outcome of the game, is a nice, but probably unnecessary addition. The action is intense, but it gets exhausting after a decent play session. The setting is challenging, but lacks the variation of the first title. Most of the problems of the previous game have been addressed, but some have not been fully rectified. Still, it is worth playing, particularly if you liked the first game, or are an action shooter junkie. NAG

**Walt Pretorius** 



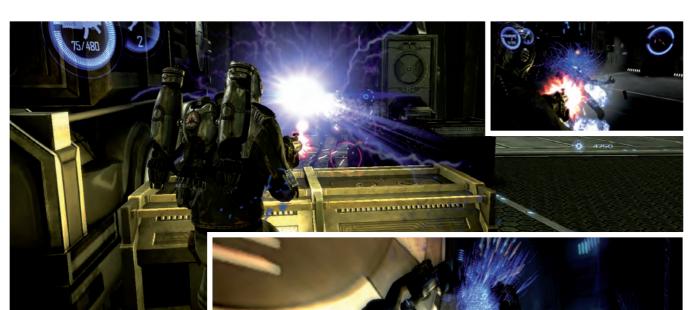


# Upgrade any timeImproved AlLots of action

# No system link A little monotonous

ΔVΔΙΙ ΔΒΙ Ε ΔΤ Look Listen

While it's a definite improvement on the first game, *Army of Two: The 40<sup>th</sup> Day* still has a few flaws. It's good fun, though.



# **Dark Void**

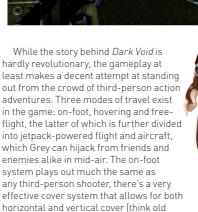
I'm as free as a bird now

Genre→ Action adventure PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

"M PRETTY SURE THERE'S an unwritten rule that says "Never travel with, or do business with your ex." If no such rule exists, it should, because if there's one thing doing the above will result in, it's trouble. In the case of William Augustus Grey, former air force pilot and current smart-ass, that trouble comes in the form of crash-landing on the wrong side of an inter-dimensional portal, courtesy of a quick shortcut through the Bermuda Triangle. The reason he's in any of this mess? His ex-fiancé, Ava, who unknowingly commissioned Grey to transport a parcel for her. So there he is, among mysterious surroundings, squabbles with his former love and lots of unfriendly robot things that have the nasty habit of shooting at people.

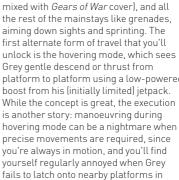
After a quick trip to a nearby village, you soon discover that you're in another world, similar to Earth but ruled by a race of aliens known as The Watchers. This species is feared by the human inhabitants and revered as gods, but a few brave souls have banded together to rebel against the threat. You'll run into a few interesting characters, the most notable of which is Nikola Tesla - renowned Russian inventor and the reason why AC/DC is more than just an Australian heavy metal band. Through a few bits of incoherent story (a running convention throughout the game), Grey decides that he'll stick around long enough to piece together an airplane to get the hell out of this crazy place. Of course, nothing ever goes according to plan, and he finds himself mixed up in all sorts of prophecy and hidden agendas.





school Prince of Persia platform action

the rest of the mainstays like grenades, aiming down sights and sprinting. The first alternate form of travel that you'll unlock is the hovering mode, which sees Grey gentle descend or thrust from platform to platform using a low-powered boost from his (initially limited) jetpack. While the concept is great, the execution is another story: manoeuvring during hovering mode can be a nightmare when precise movements are required, since you're always in motion, and you'll find yourself regularly annoyed when Grey fails to latch onto nearby platforms in



# Damage Inc.

to do so than with the enemy's own weapons? Out of the six guns available to you throughout the game, only one is the product of human engineering the Liberator Machine gun. Everything else is picked up from enemy corpses, which results in you often changing weapons based on which foes you're up against. Enemy snipers often soar high into the air with jetpacks of their dealt with by using their own powerful energy weapons against them. When in doubt, never underestimate the power of a swift kick to the squishy and repeated use can deal with even the toughest of the humanoid opponents. The biggest Watchers need a little more attention than just an influx of hot lead or steel-toed boots, and require Grey to hit a few weak spots with his regular weapons before the opportunity for a quick time event





of ammunition. Switching between these three modes takes a little getting used to initially (okay, it takes a lot), but by the end of the game Grey will be darting around

the manner that you'd expect. The one good thing about hovering mode is that Grey retains his ability to fully use his weapons, which is often necessary when you're tackling enemies that are unwilling to leave the safety of their cover. Once you've hit the right spot in the story, Grey will unlock the free-flight ability, which allows him to travel through the air at great speeds and engage enemies using the kind of machine guns you'd expect to find on a fighter plane. In this mode, he's highly manoeuvrable and can dispatch heavy targets with greater ease, largely thanks to his magically unlimited supply

The controls are a bit iffy, but for the most part, they serve their purpose decently. The biggest problem with Dark Void, however, is the action itself. It's as though the developers spent 90% of their time fiddling with the cool movement systems and animations, only to find themselves a month from deadline with little more than a tech demo. Senior producer Morgan Gray even goes as far as to admit that the basis of the game's story stemmed from gameplay objectives; I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the rest of the development followed a similar path. From about halfway through the game, you've experienced pretty much all it has to offer. It simply fails to keep things interesting, and while flying through the skies is its own reward to a certain extent, the repetitive and predictable enemy encounters and AI, sometimes excruciatingly-long sequences (there's a

the environments like he was born with a

jetpack strapped to his back.

30-minute turret sequence that's about as exciting as a snail race) and muddy story makes the remainder of the game feel like a chore more than an adventure.

Dark Void may have a good dose of cool and interesting gameplay mechanics, but it fails to keep momentum. We hope that the door left wide open by the closing cinematic leads to a sequel not marred by the same problems. NAG

**Geoff Burrows** 



# Repetitive gameplay Dull and incoherent

# Bottom Line

Some great ideas bogged down by poor execution.





# **Myst: Masterpiece Edition**

OR SOME STRANGE REASON, I didn't play Myst when I was a kid. Maybe it looked too complicated, or I was scared off by all the hair-pulling and deep sighs that plagued anyone I watched play this game, but either way, I'm glad that I finally decided to redeem myself. Myst is one of those classic titles that screams "the good old days." Everything about the game, from the poorly-aging visuals, to the grainy audio, to the horriblycompressed FMVs lends it the kind of rustic charm that you don't see today, for obvious reasons.

You play as a traveller new to the Age of Myst. There you stumble across the writings of Atrus, another traveller, and discover that there's more to this world than what meets the eye. It's up to the player to figure out everything -- why you're here, what happened before your arrival, what you need to do next. Practically nothing is spoon-fed to you, which makes it a fantastic break from the norm. From your starting location, you'll visit another four Ages, each connected to Myst through books that can be found in key areas. Even mentioning that much of the story is a bit of a spoiler, so I'll rather leave it up to you to figure out the rest.

Myst is all about observation. While it's

a puzzle game by definition, the majority of puzzles that you're presented with can be solved by connecting the dots scattered around the game world, rather than the more typical reliance on independent logic puzzles (which is hardly a bad thing, but this method makes for something quite special). Some clues are obvious, and simply require that you flip through a book or yank on a few levers, but others are more subtly hidden; they're only made apparent when you've taken the time to examine everything around you with a sharp poke from the pixel-hunting stick. The result is a game that demands your attention, and a notepad (like, the paper kind, not notepad.exe). Write down and draw absolutely everything you think may be important - chances are that it is.

Despite its praise-worthy aspects, Myst has its flaws. Elements like the node-based, pre-rendered navigation may test your patience to its limits, and the control system is about as crude as you got for its time, only bettering the dreaded text parser by approximately twelve curse words. Still, if you can overlook a few issues, you'll find Myst to be an incredibly deep, interesting, rich world that begs your exploration. NAG

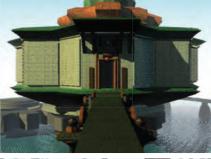
**Geoff Burrows** 













# Keeping it real

Gog.com also has realMyst in its catalogue, which I'm fairly certain was never distributed locally. Released seven years after Myst, this is a scope of movement in real time, like that found in an FPS. While many of the original's mechanical flaws are done away with in this release, it does Still, it's worth it for those who are looking to replay the title after some time, mostly thanks to the addition of another Age, which serves as an epilogue and better links the stories of Myst and its sequel, Riven.



# GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION



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SQUARE ENIX.







# DreamHack Winter 2009 - Sweden

Is bigger better? Now the answer would depend on your point of view and of course the context of the guestion. If the question was, what if rage could be 10,000 gamers instead of 2,300, what would your answer be? Since we like any excuse to be able to attend another LAN, we sent **Erich Blaschczok** and Charmain Du Plessis from VC to do the dirty work for you in search of the answer to this eternal question.

SINCE DREAMHACK IS RECORDED as the biggest LAN event in the world, we Winter 2009 was expecting in excess of 10,000 gamers. It is truly an indication represented from all parts of the world. DreamHack takes place in the southern a bit more than ten hours flight time and more than 8,000km travelled, you arrive at Frankfurt. Two hours more greets you. Now only a further 350 km by train and you arrive. Take the bus for another 4km and Elmia welcomes you in its chilly 8°C arms.

expo centre. It is a truly huge facility that Our arrival was during the setup phase, so that we could gauge what it takes one should be careful not to have too high a set of expectations just because disappointing. My expectations were somewhere along the lines of Swiss power was done, as was the network. The lack of awe was mostly due to the roughly 4,000 seats not, well, looking like a lot. Then there were the tables. The tables were wooden pallets used as the base with presswood tops. Although from a gamers perspective (the height edges were a bit rough which aggravates the height problem by leaving real some of the spacing is quite cramped depending on where you sit. The seats Some gamers overcame the height by bringing their own chairs, nice comfy high chairs. Unfortunately our hand



luggage was limited. Thus a minor issue that could have been overcome if we were The other quite nasty effect of the presswood tops is that they tend to keep could be quite disheartening if you have

to build their own little heaven in their allocated space. There were coffins, structures and guite a few functional minimalistic designs at the event. The one thing that was certainly pleasant to very forthcoming and certainly able to converse in English. This for me was the world country with cheap fast internet access would travel great distances to

play at this event. The only real answer that I can come up with is the people. I minded their own business and were not fazed by the studded Goths nor the guys blowup doll on top of his PC. I guess he needed some company during the long winter nights with such a romantic setting of fluorescence everywhere.

The network was great and they certainly ended up getting good gear. The access switches (where the gamers plug clients. Their internet access is truly link with a 10G backup. Both are utilized to able to download at were figures that I have only read about, and sometimes even a bit faster. Other than the pure

number of gamers that is DreamHacks the other. The main links between the backbone switches are decent but not great. Since all the traffic is basically

Checking in was a breeze because your bag, no power check, no way of trying to secure your equipment, no restriction in what you may bring in or take out. I felt mostly secure. The expo was only

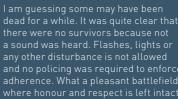
stage playing host to the countdown the duration of the event. People enthusiastically help to count down and 10,000 of my closest buddies. Darkness expo accompanies the LAN. The expo was not brilliant, nor was it bland. A you need to chop your hair, LEGO for the brainier with a desire to conquer

the world one robot at a time, game to dance. The dancing gamers were species was not at the top of coherent

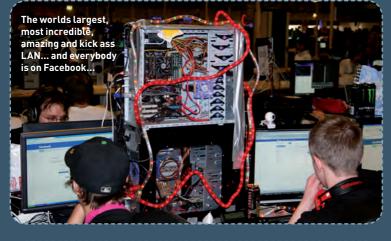
were available for the general gaming public, so the fast internet connection set for different games to be played while at the event. Spectators were certainly catered for, but the attendance

also served food at one of the outlets. I since our army food never tasted to sleeping. Blowup mattresses were across this battlefield. From the smell The Swedish army entice the young with an assault vehicle to consider it as a viable option.





The hours ticked by and before the to ever), the event was drawing to a seven hours later we were back on home ground. The conclusion: big, was great, but our homegrown concoctions still have a lot to offer and will not be replaced by the lure of data flowing years rAge, as it has already built up a lot of momentum. NAG







# Know Your Technology

refers to NVIDIA's multi-GPU or SFR (Split Frame Rendering). as AFR, but doesn't boost fill-rate or geometry performance.

**ASIC:** Application Specific Integrated Circuit. These are ICs designed for specific use rather

than general processing. GPUs are are designed for a wide variety of applications.

**X86-64:** 64-bit extension to the x86 instruction set. First introduced x86 code. This extension increases virtual and physical addressing and increases register size as well. It is 64-bit software on the x86 platform

Fill-rate: The number of pixels per second that can be output from a graphics card. This is usually measured in thousands of MPixels/ graphics cards, in general the higher the number the better.

The new X4 keyboard from Microsoft is sporting some advanced features aimed at gamers. These include macro recording and automatic macro repetition, mode and profile switching, and adjustable backlighting. A technology called antighosting is being used which allows you to press up to 26 keys at once. The keyboard hardware then scans each key independently so that each key press is detected regardless of how many other keys are being pressed at the same time. RRP: R799



# MSI sponsors local clan

Local gaming clan ATF recently secured a sponsorship deal with MSI/ Corex/Thermaltake. At the end of March, ATF will be looking to move from competitive CoD4 gaming to Battlefield Bad Company 2. Pictured in the photograph, which was taken at rAge 2009, with the two fnatic.MSI players l1nkje and Spart1e, are (left to right): Euphoria: David Dos Santos, Sales Manager at Corex; Turbo; Carnage; GReeN ORB;

# **Snippets**

flagship iMAGINE the R70.000 Acer Aspire Predator gaming PC,

Twitter web on the GF100 will **GeForce GTX** 480 and GeForce GTX 470

for Q1 2010 integrated GPUs, the new Core i3 brand, and also

Web Africa has Tier 1 ISP, Web Africa will allow



# 40 million

The popularity of 3D technology will increase dramatically over the next five years with 40 million 3D capable displays expected to be installed worldwide by 2014, according to analysis by Insight Media.

# NAG Awards

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets

HARDWARE: Ever has this award, then someone got hard for





# Hardware Scoring System

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we already have.
- A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
- What you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- This has some issues. You should shop around for something else.
- **The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.

# THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

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# **BOOM...HEADSHOT**

From: Trevor Botha

EAR NAG, LET ME start off by saying you guys and gals rock and are totally 100% awesome. Now with that out of the way I would like to know how the hell you are supposed to play online at reasonable pings and prices. Let me explain. A few months back I got a 3G connection (another one of Vodafone/ Telkom's great inventions breaking borders and making the already cramped global community even smaller) and was really satisfied with the product - that is until I bought MW2 a few days back. I logged in online and started playing the sh\*t out of it, kicking ass and taking names. (Sigh) But the problem is my 3G connection. Whenever I rush up to a guy/girl to ram my knife in his or her spine I do manage to log the kill, but what happens is I knife the person and he or she runs away and then like a retarded chinchilla suffering from spasmodic dysphonia, falls dead, 5 feet away from me (e.g. run, run, stop, crouch, look around, designate victim, rush, knife, victim runs away, victim falls dead, muffled screams of frustration are heard or whenever I equip a sniper and manage to land a headshot I = look through scope, shoot, reload, then log kill). Basically I'm suffering from delayed actions. I am always the one with the lowest ping (a pathetic 1 to 2 bars). Are there any other ways of wirelessly connecting online at reasonable prices and pings and totally avoiding my abovementioned problem? (Without using ADSL). Your loyal fan."

Neo: Well, you are suffering from high pings; not low ones (those are good). There isn't really any way to make that better with any available service locally. Some people have pings as low as 130ms, which is fine for online play using an HSDPA connection. If you are already on an HSDPA connection, there isn't much that you can do about the situation short of getting ADSL.

Geoff: Dear loyal fan. I've got some bad news for you: wireless Internet sucks for gaming. No, really, it does. While your downloads may cruise at close to the illusive 1000kb/s rate thanks to its awesome throughput, the latencies involved with wireless Internet (3G. Wi-Fi. Neotel, iBurst – you name it) will always put you at a disadvantage over players with wired connections. You may have a couple of options, however: try moving your 3G modem/router to an area of your house that has stronger signal. An improvement of a single bar of reception could bump you up to the majestic land of green pings. The next option might sound silly, but bear with me: try iBurst. And I mean try it, don't go out and get stuck into a 2-year contract just yet. Have a technician come over and perform a signal test; if you live close enough to an iBurst tower to push your signal rating above 85%, you'll be much better off (although still not as good as someone with ADSL). Don't bother going for it if the signal isn't up to spec, however,



or else you'll be stuck with an even worse quality service than what you currently receive. With 3G, you're also at the mercy of fluctuating tower loads. Gaming during odd times is a sure-fire solution to avoid the masses and squeeze every last ounce of available bandwidth in your direction. Between 5PM and 7PM is good, and anytime after midnight. With all of that said, you'd still be better off going for an entry-level ADSL package than anything wireless. A 384kb connection will cost you just R320 per month including both line rental fees and 1GB of data – which should be sufficient if you're just gaming with it. Additional data is available for as little as R14 per GB from certain ISPs.

# **GRAPHICS CARD UPGRADE**

From: Pieter

11 I, I CURRENTLY HAVE an XFX GeForce 9800GT GPU. Do you think it would be a decent decision to upgrade with another 9800GT? And also, will you see any difference in graphics or 'fps' on a 17-inch monitor if you play games like Crysis and other fairly new games?"

Neo: Another 9800GT would bring your performance levels up by a fair amount (think 9800GX2). However, you might want to consider one of the more recent cards like a GTX 260/275, Radeon 4870 or Radeon 4890. As for the difference in performance, it depends on the games you are playing. If the games were already at 70fps or more, then an additional 9800GT is unlikely to make a visible difference - this holds true for any size monitor.

# IT'S SO DARN HOT!

From: Anton Engelbrecht

I ELLO NAG, I AM running an Intel i7 920 processor, an ATI 4890 2GB and 6GB of Zeppelin ram on a Windows 7 Ultimate 32bit OS. I am writing to ask about the fact that my computer is scalding hot, not that it seems to be causing trouble, but so scalding hot I think I can fry an egg on my side panel. I have a Gigabyte Setto case with the standard fans and it is liquid cooling ready. I would like to ask if it might be a problem with my hardware or software that is causing the large amount of heat? And if it isn't, is there anything I can do to optimise my case's cooling capabilities? I have asked a lot of people about liquid cooling and they all told me to stay away from it. Is

**Neo:** If the heat isn't causing any instability to your system then you shouldn't worry. However try increasing the fan speed of your CPU or graphics card and see if that

helps, if that doesn't you can add more case

fans for better airflow. Short of that there's not much you can do.

# 5870

From: Ilyaaz Mohamed

\*\*I\_\_EY NEO, I SEE in this last issue of NAG you replied to Xavier de Rauville by saying "the GTX 295 offers the best frame rates of any graphics card across the board." Does this mean that the GTX 295 is faster than the 5870. 5770 & 5750?

**Neo:** The GTX 295 is in general faster than all those graphics cards. Only the 5970 is faster (significantly so, I might add).

# FRUSTRATED GAMER

From: Jan Nieuwoudt

## RECENTLY BOUGHT AN ASUS Rampage 2 Extreme motherboard and I'm running Windows 7 Ultimate 64 bit. However I have a problem getting my Xi-Fi soundcard that came with the board to work properly using my Logitech X530 5.1 speakers. When I do a speaker test in Windows all the speakers work fine but when playing games or watching movies only the front left and right speakers seem to work. I have downloaded the latest Creative software for Windows 7 but just can't come right. Any suggestions/sites to find resolutions on how to fix this problem will be much

**Neo:** Sounds as if all is working correctly, but the games you are playing have not been configured to take advantage of your setup. In most games there should be an options page that has an Audio section. If you can find the audio options sub menu, be sure to set your speaker configuration to surround, 5.1 or whatever configuration option is there that matches your setup. Most games will default to stereo if this is not set

If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to la There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get). NAG



REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

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# Hardware





# **Dream Machine**

Timmy: Wait, what? Is that a notebook I see here on the Dream Machine page?

NAG: Why, yes it is. Timmy: Uh? But why?

NAG: Well because it's totally awesome!

Timmy: But, err, how exactly does it fit in with my kick-ass computer?

NAG: Well see. It does. And it doesn't. And here's why. Technically speaking a notebook isn't a PC, nor is it ever the tool of choice for serious gamers. But this here notebook is an absolute must-have if you want the ultimate gaming rig - desktop or otherwise. So if you have a Dream Machine rig (and let's be honest here, piles of cash just waiting to be spent on hot computer hardware), chances are you'll want one of these just because you can. And you must. You really should. C'mon, it's real 3D!

Timmy: Ooer ... cool :) Mom!!



Notebook



Headphones



Processor



# Motherboard



# Graphics Card

















# Mouse



Total (excluding notebook): R49,729









# The Future is 3D

 $\textbf{O}^{\textit{VER THE LAST FIVE}} \text{ or six years, there have been many technologies} \\ \text{that seemed promising in as far as revolutionising the way we} \\$ interact with our digital world. Most of them, however, were just hype, others proof of concepts which will only really be available as products in the next ten years and others just abandoned. All of these technologies, however, excited me because they promised to significantly alter the way we deal with our computers, TVs or just about anything else that relays information to us.

As exciting as surround sound was when it started becoming a mainstream technology, once everybody had gotten over the initial hype of having explosions detonate behind them, the experience largely became transparent, and one would only notice it if that experience was changed back to a stereo or a mono signal. This is an achievement of consumer technology much like the advancements made by optical audio storage technologies that are part of everyday life today. No one is blown away by the wow factor of digital audio, its precision, clarity or sometimes hyper realistic music reproduction qualities in some

All that is taken for granted now, and we have even regressed to compressed format audio in MP3s and the like. So, in a way, we had to overshoot the mark so we could reel it in to what we can tolerate without feeling as if we're returned to the day of the audio cassette and vinyl. It's unfortunate that these seemingly revolutionary technologies that we all await are the ones that never arrive, but the ones that promise to enhance what we are already familiar with seem to last, provided they are fairly easy to integrate into our daily lives. Any technology or advancement that needs us to significantly alter the way we do things will likely remain a novelty unless the inconvenience is vastly outweighed by the benefits

Once again, I will make an example of optical media. As a medium of storage and content distribution, it still makes sense, even in this day of high speed internet and large caps (South Africa withstanding). Optical media remains the favoured distribution method for many industries and for obvious reasons. That, however, should not and cannot be mistaken for the willingness of people to adopt a new optical media format and or revision that requires further investment.

Despite the technical and scientific hurdles that would have had to be conquered, Blu-ray would have had a much faster adoption rate if it were compatible with current DVD players. The promise of higher definition video isn't enough to sway many who are invested in their home theatre setups or any other system that already makes use of DVD media. The idea of optical media itself is rather unattractive for many reasons, not limited to, but including, vulnerability to scratches, minor compatibility issues and most of all, the physical size of the medium and the size of the device that reads the discs. Back then when optical media was introduced, the benefits of being able to store vast amounts

of content on such a disc more than outweighed these issues. After the turn of the century, though, asking people to make the same investment for more of the same thing (which in essence is just clearer video) isn't enticing enough. This is true especially considering that this isn't a single product upgrade much like it was with  $\tilde{\text{CD}}$  players or DVD players. With Blu-ray or HD media as a whole, a new display is necessary if you don't already have one. No, this isn't enough of an incentive really. However, if with this investment there is something that fundamentally changes the viewing experience, then the move to this newer technology will be driven by the consumer rather than retailers and manufacturers.

Simply put, the promise of HD is compelling, but not enough. However, HD with 3D makes the investment worthwhile. If one is able to experience movies like Avatar not only in full HD, but in 3D as well (just like at the cinema), then the investment is definitely justified. The interesting thing about 3D is that the technology on the side of content creation is already there, and the resources required by the studios to achieve this are few. On the side of the consumer, you'd still purchase exactly what you would to move to the "full" HD experience, but the difference is you'd not only be looking out for the "Full HD" Sticker, but the "3D Ready" sticker instead. Other than an investment into the actual glasses, people are already buying the required displays, and media players. All that needs to be added to that is a set or several sets of glasses, for significantly less money than what any individual component in an HD setup costs. The upside to this however is that the experience is enriched in a way that more than justifies the cost of the glasses.

3D may just be one of the very few things that costs less than many of the things that supposedly enhance our media, but in actuality revolutionises the viewing experience. 3D is certainly the future and one that's certainly worth investing in.

> "Simply put, the promise of HD is compelling, but not enough.

However, HD with 3D makes the investment worthwhile."

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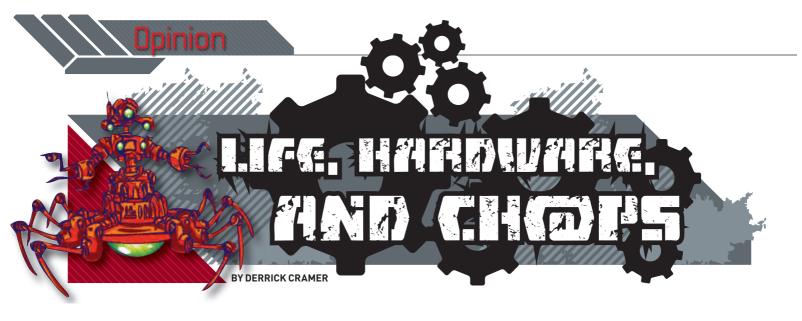






ALSO AVAILABLE





# LANning: mistakes to be avoided

**MORE OFTEN THAN NOT** people arrive at the LAN of their choice, be it public or private, with dead hardware. If, by some miracle, the hardware survives the trip undamaged, it will only be a matter of time before sparks fly, smoke rises or someone gets drawn on in their sleep. The last one is unavoidable, but the previous two can be avoided with a little effort on your part.

# ONE BUMPY RIDE.

You'd be surprised at how many LANners have loose hardware in their PC. Hard drives slide around, graphics cards bump in their sockets, the motherboard PCB scratches on its standoff screws. The result is dead hardware that could be avoided. So, the first rule of looking after hardware at a LAN: make sure everything is secure. This is easy enough, and can be fixed with five minutes of effort and a screwdriver. Make sure each screw is tight, but not too much, and if your case makes use of a screwless installation, screw the hardware in anyway. Most screwless installation setups use cheap plastic clips or rubber that provide too much leeway.

# OVERLOADING POWER SOCKETS

I've been at public LANs where the network downtime has lasted for 60 percent of the event. I've been to private LANs where ten PCs have - through a jungle of multiplugs - been plugged into one socket. The result almost always is damaged hardware and a ruined LANning experience. With most gaming PCs using at least 500W PSUs, no more than four should be plugged into one wall socket, and that's already pushing it. The second rule of looking after hardware at a LAN: make sure you have enough power to go around and that it's spread around the room. Once again, not so hard to fix. Ensure that you are taking power from multiple phases in your house/ venue. Phases can be found by testing which plugs are on which circuit on your house/venues power circuit board. Five minutes of inconvenience can make your LAN a more pleasant experience and save your hard drives from corruption.

### THE HARDWARE DUDE

Every group has one of these guys. He normally has long hair or glasses and is quite knowledgeable about PC hardware in general. If for whatever reason you have a hardware issue, make sure this guy looks at it. All too often I've seen people open their PC thinking they are fully qualified to fix whatever problem may come their way. After plugging a SATA data cable into an IDE cable slot (yes, I've seen it happen), they pronounce loudly that the machine is fixed. This is usually followed with the sound of a PC not switching on. The third rule of LANning: let the pros do what they do best. Letting a knowledgeable guy work on your PC is not the end of the world; he has the required skill needed for the task at hand, coupled with the right tools for the job.

# THE TABLES REQUIRED

Think about it: you arrive at a venue and get told to setup on an old rusty trestle table or a door balancing on two chairs. Are you really going to? I've seen tables fall over, table legs brake off, a counter top fall off two barstools, and more. Besides, it isn't a very pretty sight. The end result is a few scuffed shins and a pile of hardware that was once your PC. The fourth rule of LANning: make sure your equipment is secure. Whether it means reinforcing the table legs or bringing your own fold up table to a LAN, a sturdy surface will improve your game and keep vour hardware safe.

A bit of common sense never hurt anyone, so before you plan your next LAN event, make sure you have your bases covered. The hardware you transport to LANs and back offers you countless hours of fun and memories to last a lifetime, the least you can do is look after it. NAG

'Think about it: you arrive at a venue and get told to setup on an old rusty trestle table or a door balancing on two chairs. Are you really going to? I've seen tables fall over, table legs brake off, a counter top fall off two barstools, and more."





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E'RE ALWAYS TOLD, AND had all manner of scientific experiments prove to us, that technology is an eternal cycle of improvement - improvement both in performance as well as efficiency.

Each successive generation of die-size packs more and more transistors into a smaller and smaller package. Sometimes whole new materials are employed to further boost this evolution of efficiency in passing electrical current. Less leakage, less waste, more grunt.

And yet, power supply (PSU) vendors are smiling wider and wider. These days an average-spec workstation is looking at 450W at least, a decent gaming desktop 600W. All-singing, all-dancing monsters need R4,000 kV-plus PSUs screwed into their designated bay to power the plethora of tasty bits installed. Where's the efficiency?

### PEEKING INTO THE PAST

It being ten years into the new millennium, we thought we'd jump back a decade to when the 20 prefix to the year was still fresh and new, and measure just why these two messages don't seem to add up at first glance. Why are we consuming more and more juice to run our rigs although the tech employed is supposedly becoming more and more power-conscious?

At first, it appears that there are just a few components to look to for the answers, the biggest pair being the CPU and GPU.

### THE CULPRITS

Diving straight into the heart of the modern gaming rig, let's tackle the CPU. These were the glory days, of aiming for the stars and striving to crack the 1GHz barrier, which those who postulate on such things had postulated might have been a physical limit,

the extreme to which silicone can be pushed. As they usually are, they turned out to be quite wrong, but nevertheless it was a time when the march of technology seemed to be peaking.

Although AMD was technically the first to cross this milestone, Intel was hot on its heels with the 1GHz Pentium III chip. In 2000,

the company introduced the ill-fated Pentium IV, but still, if you had a GHz part from the older generation you were pretty cool, and the Thermal Design Power (TDP) was a whopping 35W. Pushing the absolute envelope, clocked at 1.2GHz, these processors were downing 39.8W, using a 180nm die.

Today, a gamer's dream Core i7 running in the region of 3GHz with multiple cores, is rated at a seemingly ludicrous 130W TDP! A 950, for instance, is clocked at 3.06GHz per core in a quad-core layout. Even the mainstream Core i5 series comes in at 95W.

Mathematically, it's correct: three times the power draw for three times the MHz. So the Wattsper-MHz has remained fairly consistent, but that still means your PSU has to have the capacity to handle peak loads when needed, and, therefore, has to be a substantially beefier unit. Besides, where exactly is the efficiency enhancement of the 45nm versus 180nm process, not to mention the effect of new low-resistance metals and the like?

When we look at graphics cards, it's really even more surprising, and for those of us who were around at the time, surprising just how far back in tech development ten years takes you. Back then, graphics cards only needed a single-digit number to identify them, and anyone with a GHz CPU was likely to have something of the ilk of the GeForce 2 GTS fitted in their AGP slots. Now, actually getting the TDP of one of these babies is tricky. I still have the box of my old GeForce 2, and even scouring the packaging and manuals revealed no clue of the power being drawn. Only shortly thereafter, the time of the GeForce 3 Ti 500s



launched in 2001, did GPUs suddenly require more than the de facto 200-250W PSU could deliver.

Testers were running power meters at the wall and, therefore, couldn't give an exact answer either, only an estimated number, so we'll take the average guess of around 16W for this example. A mere 16W? Remember this was at a core clock of 200 MHz, with RAM clocked to 400, and a generous 64MB of dedicated framebuffer capacity. This was one beastly card in its day. I recall having one and it just blowing the competition away.

A GTX 285, the fastest of the breed today, draws 204W! A 280 sucks up 235. Now we begin to see where all that supplied power is being consumed - the GPU is a major devourer of juice in a gaming rig.

The D3D API opened up whole new possibilities for game designers in terms of visual impact, but processors capable of running these new-fangled programmable shaders simply rampaged skywards in terms of their TDPs, clearly. At a recent AMD event that I attended, there were 5890s floating about, but I was told you needed a GW PSU at least to power this critter reliably.

**THE LITTLE THINGS**However, the GPU isn't the only culprit for our increasing appetite for massive Watts. There are a host of smaller things, which all add up as well. Naturally, the array of hard drives stacked in your tower all pull their own load; the chipset on the motherboard, every stick of DDR installed add a few more to the tally, and even that handy little interface USB takes its toll. Each USB device attached to the machine, and therefore powered by the motherboard, which in turn is powered by the PSU, draws around 6W extra.

Absolutely and undeniably, the performance of these parts has accelerated at least in-line with their consumption, so you're now paying a similar, if not marginally lower Watt per MHz of clock speed. The optical drive is perhaps the exception



that proves the rule, now offering significantly faster read and write performance as well as supporting the monolithic capacity of the DVD for no additional power cost: 25W from CD-ROM to DVD-RW.

But it doesn't change the fact that with each successive generation, you're paying more in electricity bills to run your machine. Yes, for the most part they get things done quicker, but that's not always the case, as developers naturally code their apps to take full advantage of the headroom available, jamming your CPU cycles with additional features and content so that it performs daily tasks at a rate very similar to your old system.

On the up side, these latest-generation CPU and GPUs, that need their own miniature nuclear plants to run properly, have come on in leaps and bounds in terms of power conservation. In the days when being ecologically-friendly meant little more than ensuring you separated your plastics and glass, the silicone in our machines wasn't as smart as it is today, and a rig pulling 180W would pretty much always be pulling 180W, whether idle or at full load. Now they're able to regulate and manage their power consumption based on usage models, and can power right down to essentials-only if using the machine for light office work, for power draw figures at idle close to, if not smaller than, the older parts, which had no fancy on the fly clock- and voltage-adjustments.

That pretty much sums it up, at least as far as the components that place load on the PSU go, but there is a bit more to the whole power consumption story to consider. Monitors.

### **DISPLAY OF POWER**

For a long time, the CRT tube was the largest element of a system's power draw equation. These screens would draw 50-60W in "regular" 15-inch guise, a figure which rose to 85W when the 19-inch became popular. Modern LCDs draw much less, but don't scale quite as well. So, for instance, a 19-inch LCD, in fact up to a 22-inch or so, will be sipping 30-35W. But this figure climbs quite rapidly, due to the number of additional LCDs needed, when you scale beyond 24-inch. That said, a 30-inch LCD will use about the same, perhaps just

on the up stoe, these talest, that On the up side, these latest need their own miniature nuclear Plants to run property, have come valuation leads and bounds in terms of power conservation.

slightly more, power than a 19-inch CRT.

Still, at least it is nice to know that some elements of our gaming rigs are actually consuming less of that near-mystical power source flowing from your wall sockets, and through our stressed national grid. Server components are where energy-efficiency is "at" these days, which is strange as there are far more desktop machines out there, and as their power consumption just climbs and climbs, replacing your 50-odd server rack with parts twice as efficient isn't going to balance the load. And yet these systems are some of the most powerful number-crunchers available, so why the discrepancy?

The end result is simply this. If you're a gamer, and want that rig which is going to run everything at maximum resolutions and a minimum of 60 blazing fps, be prepared to pay as our national power provider sends electricity prices into a whole new, neverbefore-seen dimension. A good tip would be to get as powerful a single-GPU graphics solution as possible, and forego the SLI or Crossfire setups entirely. With the CPU too, if your power bill is a concern, the parts which are just below the absolute high-end are guite a lot more reasonable than the real big boys, and not that much less capable. That said, if your wallet can handle the Extreme Edition chips, you may not be terribly bothered by R5,000 electricity bills.

A brief addendum: an interesting development to watch is that of the Intel Atom CPU. These parts are now running 1.6 GHz for a power draw of just 8W, since they are designed to run in mobile devices on nothing but Li-lon battery packs. They certainly aren't gaming material, but they run productivity applications as well as you'd expect a 1.6GHz processor to run them, for a tenth the power draw of a regular desktop processor. Although stepping backward in pure performance terms, if the environmentally-conscious have any say in the evolution of technology, expect to see a lot more conventional office desktops being powered by Atoms in favour of the stripped-down, but still fairly power-heavy Celeron range, for the benefit of ongoing power cost savings. NAG

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# MIDIA

TIS RARE IN entertainment technology to see a re-emergence of a technology that goes on to redefine the way we view and interact with our media. The change from black and white TV to colour was significant, so was the change from VHS to DVD in much the same way the move from SD to HD will be one of those pivotal points we refer to years from now.

All these technologies or progressions were a first. For the most part, there was no attempt to introduce the DVD prior to its introduction in the mid to late 90s. This is very different from the technology we are looking at here.

3D, stereoscopy or stereoscopic imaging has been around for a while. In fact, the first examples of stereoscopic imagery date back as early as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. So the need to perceive depth in images is not new, and, since then, it has been one of the sidelined but highly interesting fields of research when dealing with imaging as a whole.

In our context where gaming is concerned, stereoscopic technology has reared its head at various times since the advent of the video game. Different technologies were employed to simulate these 3D capabilities, some more successful than others, but in general,

all of them left a lot to be desired, and as such this is an area that remained undeveloped for a very long time

NVIDIA has, in the past, supported 3D in their earlier chipsets such as the RivaTNT and the TNT2. This 3D was a rudimentary passive system that made use of anaglyph glasses to simulate the depth effect on screen with the image rendered accordingly. The experience was marred however by the headaches and nausea that many people suffered from. In fact, while the effect looked better, it was just as off putting as using Nintendo's Virtual Boy console, which was a guaranteed headache-inducing exercise.

Today, however, the investment into 3D technology has finally produced something worthwhile; in fact, we finally have an implementation that is not only impressive, but downright revolutionary in the experience it delivers.

NVIDIA over the last couple of years has promoted 3D Vision, but the company's efforts concentrated on GeForce 3D Vision, which makes use of dedicated hardware to add the perception of depth on a 2D screen. The other method is called 3D Vision Discover and makes use of anaglyph glasses. The effect is similar to that which was available many years

# The V

# Transmitter and Glasses

A wheel on the glasses allows you to select the depth you want in any game. Some work best with the least you want many game. Some work best with the leas amount of depth value while other titles need more. Note: As one gets used to the stereo effect, the depth value can be increased. Too much can cause eye strain, so they are best kept at default levels or lower at first.



# Fvolu

ago and offers the same drawbacks and advantages as it did before.

## **GEFORCE 3D VISION**

This technology is by far the most impressive 3D effect one can observe on the PC, or any other platform for that matter. This requires a pair of liquid crystal glasses, a transmitter, a compatible display and some support from the hardware driver.

The method uses alternate frame sequencing (not related to alternate frame rendering use in multi GPU setups like SLI), which is dependent on the LCD displaying alternate perspectives of the same image in sync with the glasses to create the stereo image. These glasses use polarized liquid crystal lenses where, if voltage is applied to these lenses they block light, and this alternating blocking of the image at 60Hz per lens creates the perception of depth or stereoscopic vision.

The side effect of this method however is that it renders a slightly dimmer image than what one would naturally view. This is because each eye effectively receives half the light it naturally would when looking directly at the display. This is similar to watching a movie with tinted

glasses. However, contrast is preserved and, unlike with anaglyph glasses, there is no colour bleed at all. These shutter glasses also allow for much wider viewing angles as well, making them a lot more comfortable than anaglyph glasses, as the image need not be directly in front of you for the effect to work.

# REQUIREMENTS FOR GEFORCE 3D VISION

Since this is an active 3D system, every component requires power to operate. To make use of this system, one requires an LCD or CRT that is capable of an effective 120Hz refresh rate. This is because each lens or eye effectively receives 60fps or 60Hz, which is the minimum refresh rate required for headache-free viewing. Obviously, higher refresh rates are supported as well (provided the graphics card and display are capable of such settings), but 120Hz should be more than enough for most people. Where the actual image rendering is concerned, the graphics card has a part to play in that it effectively needs to render the image twice and as such you should lose half the performance, but surprisingly the performance hit is not as severe,





While in this view one can appreciate the effect while still appreciating the track and backdrop that's almost perfect, even with motion blur at high speed.



NVIDIA has a kit available on their website which includes the shutter glasses, transmitter, and the brilliant Samsung 2233RZ LCD, which was one of the first GeForce 3D Vision-certified monitors on the market. In general, however, any display that is capable of 120Hz is compatible with the system. This includes the Acer GD24HQ, GD235HZ, the Viewsonic FuHzion VX2265wm and the locally unavailable Alienware Optx AW2310. However, while this list may seem small, all of Samsung's Series 6 and 7 LED TVs are 120Hz capable, so it's possible to use your Home Theatre LED TV to experience GeForce 3D Vision. This holds true for many Mitsubishi DLP LCDs and just about any other 120Hz+ display.



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TATE CAMERA

The combined effect of 3D Vision and the PhysX enabled game is stunning

usually 30-40 percent in most titles. With that said, it's worth remembering that GeForce 3D Vision is a high-end feature and as such, is suited only to GTX280 class graphics cards and higher. If you add PhysX acceleration in a supporting game, you'll ideally want a GTX295 or a dedicated PhysX card in the form of a 9800GTX+ or better.

### **USER EXPERIENCE**

The 3D effect rendered by enabling 3D Vision is hard to put into words, and it's impossible to capture in a still image, but it really is incredible, particularly when dealing with games built with 3D Vision in mind. Titles like Batman: Arkham Asylum, Avatar, Resident Evil 5 and others deliver the best 3D experience. Batman: Arkham Asylum allows one to make use of PhysX and 3D Vision simultaneously. creating a truly unique experience that's just not available on any other platform. The perception of depth is nothing short of amazing and, with tens of hours of continuous testing, one gets used to the effect, and it becomes critical to the gaming experience.

Games such as Need For Speed: Shift, which look great already, look even better and arguably play better with 3D Vision enabled. Most of the camera views are impressive, but in particular the cockpit view has incredible detail and lends itself well to the 3D effect. The bumper cam view on the other hand only has the basic gauges, but the sensation of speed is significantly improved and can only be described as breath taking. It's probably the most thrilling view in 3D,

however it can grow tiring after a few laps as the level of concentration required is significantly higher than in any other view. First person, games like Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 also prove to be even more engaging with 3D enabled. Unfortunately, because of crosshair issues, it is recommended that one use the NVIDIA 3D laser sight crosshair, which seems like it's hovering over the game more than actually being part of it. Still, you can use the in-game crosshair if you prefer, and you will grow accustomed to it after a while. The game experience itself is taken to new heights and, just like with the other games, it's the immersion in the game world that leaves a lasting impact.

It is to be noted, however, that all games are supported with GeForce 3D Vision, but there's an extensive triple-A title support list. At the time of writing, over 350 games supported in some form or another.

Overall, NVIDIA's 3D Vision is a significant stride in the right direction for PC gaming, and is a great incentive to invest in a multi-GPU or high-end graphics card setup. Ever-increasing frame rates are great, but for the first time in PC gaming, there's a real and tangible reason for buying a high-end graphics card. This is one important area where the competition just has no alternative, and in any title that can take advantage of both 3D Vision and PhysX, there just isn't an option but to go NVIDIA, as this is truly game changing technology. NAG Neo Sibeko

# DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

### Part 1: 12cm fan installation

**LA FELCOME TO THE FIRST** of this series. Over the coming months, We'll show you how to do a number of super cool things with power tools. Cutting, drilling, grinding, etching, and more – if it involves the use of power tools, and most importantly has something to do with gaming, we'll try to cover it.

In this first tutorial, we'll show you how to modify (or "mod") your computer case to accommodate an additional cooling fan. Why? Because heat is the gamers' enemy. Whether you're into overclocking or just want your expensive hardware to operate in the best-possible environment, you need to ensure that the airflow through your case is sufficient. In this example, I'm using an old case that's in dire need of a breath of fresh air; the side panel's passive vent is just not cutting it anymore. You can use this tutorial for any similar task, however: adding fans to the top, sides, front or rear of your case, or cutting open a massive hole for a Perspex window. The idea is that you learn from the principles shown to you in this tutorial (and those in the future), and apply it however you want.

### STEP 1: PREPARATION

You know that expression "measure twice, cut once?" Yeah, it's not kidding around. The best thing you can do before you start cutting up your mom's office PC is make sure that you know exactly what you're doing. I'll use the 12cm fan grill as a guide for the cut, and the screw holes in the grill to mark where I'm going to drill.

Working on the unpainted side of the panel, mark out the hole that you want to cut, as well as the screw holes, with a pencil or permanent marker. Make sure that the drill holes are properly aligned, or else you'll end up with a wonky-looking fan.

### STEP 2: CUTTING, GRINDING AND DRILLING

- 1) Since we're dealing with steel, attach the cutting disc and set the Dremel to full-speed (10), and start cutting. Cut just inside the circle; we'll need a bit of room to smarten things up afterwards. Go as slowly as you need to and don't apply too much pressure. If the cutting disc starts to make a low, complaining noise, lay off the pressure a bit. If you go too quickly or use too much force, you'll break the disc. For a project as brief as this, there's no reason for you to use more than a single disc.
- 2) Use the grinding stone (at speed 8 for steel, or 6 for aluminium) to gently file down the burrs around the inside edge. Take your time to ensure you have a clean, even circle.
- 3) Double-check the alignment of the drill holes. When you're satisfied, drill.

### STEP 3: INSTALLATION

- 1) Now for the easy part: installing the fan. The fan's support struts indicate the direction that the air will flow (always towards the struts). Since this installation requires the fan to draw air into the case, we'll install the fan with the struts facing inwards. Typically, fans on the sides or front of the case draw cool air into the case, while those at the rear and top are used for exhausting the warm air.
- 2) Put the fan and the grill in place. Screw each screw in place. Don't over-tighten; the fan's plastic will crack.
- 3) Attach the fan's power adaptor to either a free Molex connector or a three-pin power header on the motherboard, depending on what adaptor your fan has. The only thing that can really go "wrong" is if you've got the alignment of the drill holes wrong. If this happens; don't panic - re-drill as best as possible and hope that there's enough steel left for the screws to hang on to.

That's it! If everything went smoothly and you installed the fan in the correct direction, you should now have a cooler PC. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding this or future tutorials, please don't hesitate to e-mail us. Happy modding! NAG

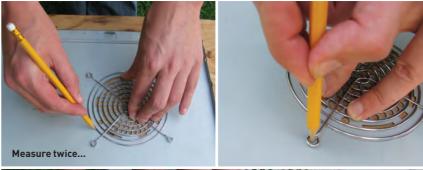
**Geoff Burrows** 

### What you need

- Dremel tool and SpeedClic attachment. I'm using the cordless
- and grinding stone 8215.
  Power drill. I'm using the Bosch PSR
  10,8 LI. You can also use the Dremel
  for drilling, but it's limited to holes of
- Computer fan (12cm is standard for this purpose) with four self-tapping screws (usually included) and fan
- Philips screwdriver. Pencil or permanent marker.



area for cutting. I'm just using an old wooden table, and a shoebox to elevate the case off the surface. Oh, and don't do this in your room; the garden should be fine.















### Tips from the Expert

### A few words by Juergen Lauer at Dremel South Africa

Dremel offers a complete range of cutting discs to work with various materials, including ferrous and non-ferrous metals. The cutting diameter of the discs has been improved to 38mm. The bigger size cuts more efficiently and also lasts longer. For cutting plastic and PVC, use the special PVC cutting disc SC476. These discs are all fibreglass reinforced for more agility and longer life. The reinforcing prevents the disc from breaking whilst remaining flexible. This also makes using the disc easier and a lot safer. For very precise cuts, Dremel offers discs as thin as 0.75mm, allowing you to be very accurate with less material removal and wastage. These discs are available in the traditional bolt-on mandrel or the new SpeedClic system, which is a unique innovation from Dremel. This enables you to quickly change cutting discs without any extra tools.

Another option for cutting and shaping plastics is to use the range of high speed cutters. These are very effective when you need to cut out intricate shapes, as discs are limited to straight cuts mainly

Choosing the correct speed is very important. Setting the speed right will ensure that you will cut at an optimum speed and your discs will last longer. Dremel has a chart in each product manual to guide you in choosing the right speed. When cutting, do not try to cut deep cuts in one go. Rather do a series of shallow cuts. Move your tools slightly forward and backwards in a sawing motion as it results in longer disc life.

Always wear goggles and gloves when cutting or grinding. To smooth off the burrs or rough edges, you can use a sanding drum and a fine grit sanding band For metal edges, the aluminium oxide stones work best.

# THE DREMEL DRIVER 7.2V LI-ION



## DREMEL 7.2V

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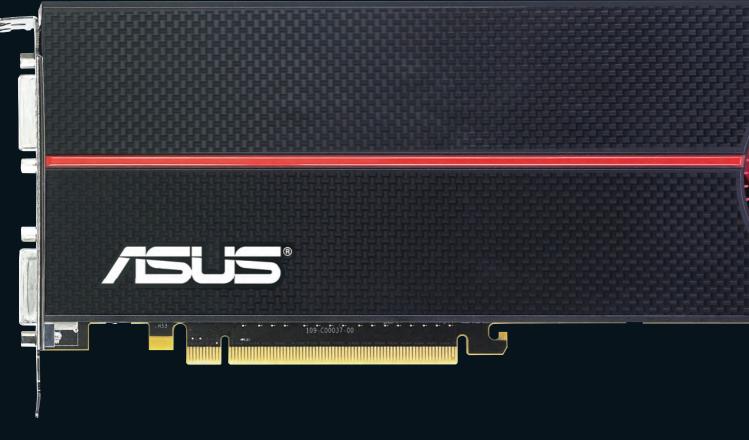
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# **ASUS EAH5970**

F WE HAD TO pick one graphics company that has done more to bring high-end graphics performance to the mainstream, it would have to be ATI. With the release of the HD3000 series, ATI began slashing prices on all their products, and even though this did not start a price war with the competition as such, it meant that whatever the products lacked, they could make up for in pricing and availability.

This was more evident in the HD4000 series, where the best performing single GPU part in the form of the HD4870 was retailing at the \$199 mark, making it the most powerful graphics card in that price bracket. In fact, the HD4870, while not a match for the GTX280 of the time, was close enough in performance for it to not make a difference in the vast majority of games.

With the release of the HD4890, ATI had perfected their pricing model and was able to deliver a truly high-end single-GPU graphics card at a price where the competition could only offer rebranded parts or products that were slightly faster, but at significantly higher prices. This trend would have carried on with the HD5000 series, but, because of some yield problems with the 40nm process at TSMC, this was not the case.

However, at the time of writing, this was no longer an issue and not only

had production improved, but it meant that cards such as the ASUS EAH5970 could actually be bought at retail outlets. Great news for those who are looking to jump onto the DirectX11 bandwagon, but don't want to compromise on anything in particular where speed is concerned.

As fantastic a product as the Radeon HD5870 is, for those employing high resolutions in the order of 1920x1080 to 2560x1600 with 4xAA, the card was simply not enough in some games. For that, there is still no single GPU graphics card that can deliver the required performance. The sheer amount of pixel-pushing power required for such settings is more than any current GPU technology can achieve without resorting to multi GPU rendering techniques such as Crossfire.

Crossfire may have started as a questionable technology with poor implementation some years ago, but today it's near perfect, with performance scaling in most games that aren't host-CPU bound. In the case of the HD5970 this would be almost every game. This isn't because the load balancing on the graphics card is poorer than in the previous generation parts, but a result of over 2TFlops of processing power and insane fill-rate numbers paired with no less than a quarter of a terabyte of

bandwidth. This kind of power is hard to harness in the context of gaming only, and the only real way to have this graphics card reach its limits is to employ AA settings of 8xAA and higher. With that said, most sampling patterns above 4xMSAA tend to yield results that are increasingly hard to distinguish from each other. For most people, an image with 8xMSAA applied to it placed next to one with only 4xMSAA looks exactly the same. It is only upon inspecting the details at close proximity where the staircase effect can be witnessed on the 4xMSAA image. This, however, is not noticeable on moving pictures and that is what the HD5970 is made for. In fact it's hard to find a game that one could play on this graphics card that does not deliver more than 100 fps and, yes, this holds true for Crysis: Warhead, as well. The only way to bring the frame rate down is to employ 4xAA and 16xAF. Even at those settings, the HD5970 delivers frame rates that would cause tearing on many LCD monitors if V-Synch had to be disabled. This is the first graphics card we have ever tested that's been capable of such a feat. Even the competitor's best dual GPU solution can't come close to these numbers. We would even go as far as to say in this particular title, the host CPU frequency was the limiting





**Heaven Benchmark** *1920x1080***:** 1,496 **Crysis: Warhead** *1920x1080 4xAA***:** 78 3DMark Vantage: 3DMark 06: Resident Evil 5 1920x1080 4xAA: 136.5

factor and frame rates above 80fps can be achieved with a faster CPU.

If at this point you're wondering about the overclocking capabilities of the graphics card, much like most ATI graphics cards of late, the limiting factor will be in the cooling. While the 40nm process ensures that the card never gets too hot to operate, putting two such GPUs on a single PCB generates vast amounts of heat that's difficult to deal with. Load temperatures do reach the 69°C mark but never pass the 75°C threshold, and with the fan speed turned up slightly, these load temperatures can be brought down a good 5°C or so. Having said that, overclocking proved to be surprisingly easy, and the maximum clock frequency we reached

Core: 725MHz Cypress (40nm) Render Outputs: 64 Memory: 2GB GDDR5 2GHz (256GB/sec) API: DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.0

was 810MHz on each core and a healthy 1.2GHz (4.8GHz QDR) on the memory.

As for the performance implications of this overclocking, to no surprise, scores and frame rates hardly increased at all. A clear sign of the host system limitations (keep in mind we used a 3.6GHz Core i7 975XE CPU), which means that the EAH5970 will last you well into 2011 and maybe 2012. There's so much more to mention about the EAH5970, but the most important aspect of the card is that it is incredibly fast and completes ATI's domination of the DirectX11 market. If a nocompromise DirectX11 card is what you want, there is no doubt the EAH5970 is the card to buy. NAG

Neo Sibeko



### Minus

- Availability - Price





# ASUS ROG G51J-3D notebook

E'VE ALWAYS HAD A hard time justifying desktop replacement notebooks; they're usually bulky, cost a small fortune and offer half the experience at twice the price, with the only advantage being the portability. Even then, battery power is limited to an hour at best while gaming

Things are slowly getting better with the newer platforms, in particular the new Core i7 platform and its various speed boosting and power saving features. We are not, however, at a stage where we can comfortably recommend a notebook over a desktop with an equivalent price tag.

Keeping the above in mind, when we received the ASUS ROG G51J-3D notebook. imagine how jaded we were at the prospect of reviewing yet another desktop replacement notebook. However, the G51J-3D has one feature that makes it stand out from all gaming notebooks on the market. Adorned with the honour of being the first in the computing world isn't always a good thing, but with regards to the G51J-3D, being the first 3D Vision certified notebook is an accolade ASUS should be proud of, and one you should pay particular attention to if you're in the market.

The G51J-3D features a 120Hz 1920x1080 15.6-inch LCD and comes fully equipped with NVIDIA's 3D Vision pack, all of which means that you can, for the first time, experience 3D enabled games in full stereo 3D. (For more on that.

see our feature on page 78). This alone makes the notebook unique and, to add to that, the notebook does put in some reasonable numbers.

The specifications of the G51J-3D are impressive and the unit we reviewed featured two 320GB hard drives. One was a 7200rpm drive which made for brisk performance and almost zero lag when loading large video files and the like. Our unit did not feature the Blu-ray drive which is available as an option, but the dual-layer DVD-RW drive was installed.

The graphics card employed by the G51J-3D is NVIDIA's GTX260M with 1GB of dedicated GDDR3 VRAM. As great as that looks on paper, the truth is that the mobile GTX 200 range of graphics processors from NVIDIA are based on the G92 core and not the GT200 as the name suggests. Where the GTX260M is concerned, the performance is equal to that of the 8800GT or 9800GT if you prefer with 112 stream processors, 16 render outputs and a 256-bit memory bus. There is a 128-stream processor GTX280M. but this is not an option on the G51J-3D, and as such enabling the 3D Vision has a noticeable impact on performance in most titles except the older ones.

Having said that, most games play well on the G51J-3D and the only performance issues occur when attempting to play the games at the native LCD resolution of 1920x1080. So gaming resolutions are

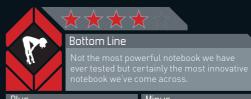
best kept at a maximum of 1280x720, which should be more than enough for most people.

Aesthetically, it's rather bulky, especially with the two hard drives installed. Despite its size and weight, the design makes for a very attractive notebook, finished in a dark blue gloss plastic coating. It certainly looks like it belongs to the ROG family. To sweeten an already great deal, ASUS includes the budget, but gaming-orientated, Razer Abyss mouse.

With such a package it's hard not to like the G51J-3D notebook, and in fact this is simply the most impressive notebook we have tested to date. For the combination of style, performance and innovation we have to give the ASUS ROG G51J-3D a nod and declare it as our first Dream Machine Notebook! NAG

Neo Sibeko

Graphics: NVIDIA GTX260M HDD: 2x 320GB SATA2





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■ T'S BEEN FOUR MONTHS since ATI released their HD 5000 range of graphics cards. Unlike with the introduction of DirectX10 in early 2007, this time ATI made it a point to be the first IHV to market with a compliant family of graphics cards. In addition, with the HD 5670, ATI has released a DirectX11 graphics card in every price segment before the competition has had a chance to release a single card.

The latest addition to the Radeon 5000 series is the HD 5670, and we will say it now: this is one impressive graphics card. With an MSRP of \$99, the HD 5670 brings new levels of performance to the price segment that would have been unimaginable a few years ago.

This level of performance is obviously the result of the great engineering minds at ATI. Achieving this performance at this price point is largely because of TSMC's 40nm process which is capable of producing GPUs about half the size of their 65nm process, or if you prefer, GPUs with twice the gate count while maintaining the same die size. This not only means the cost to manufacture each GPU is significantly reduced, it also means the entire graphics card is cheaper.

The power phases required are reduced, the PCB layout and complexity is reduced, and last but not least, the graphics card is physically smaller and needs no additional power. These factors make it favourable for OEMs and HTPC users. To gamers, though, this means even those on the tiniest of budgets can enjoy current titles at moderate frame rates and relatively good image quality.

The Redwood core features an impressive 400 stream processors which makes it faster than 2007's HD 2900XT and 2008's HD 3870 in computational tasks. Not only is this the case, but the HD 5670 features GPGPU computing ability that these previous parts lacked, such as full support for OpenCL 1.0 and Direct Compute 5.0 courtesy of DirextX11 compliance.

Where performance is concerned, the HD 5670 delivers impressive frame rates for the price. In the Resident Evil 5 benchmark, the card delivered an impressive 55fps at 1280x1024 with 2xAA applied. Crysis Warhead, a strenuous title for most graphics cards, was playable at 35fps using the Gamer profile at 1280x1024. This kind of performance has only been available to graphics cards above the \$100 mark, but as it is now in 2010, the 5670 proves to be amongst the most capable entry level graphics cards on the market.

API compliance has always been a check-box feature in entry level cards, and, sadly, this is not any different with the HD 5670. We don't' have many DirectX11 titles available to us but the Unigine Heaven benchmark indicates that the HD 5670 is not capable of handling some of the more advanced features of DirectX11, such as the advanced order surface techniques and tessellation that the benchmark uses. As such, even at 1280x1024, the card scores only 452 points which is just a little lower than the 500 we would have considered fair. However, it should be remembered that synthetic benchmarks are inherently more taxing on the hardware than an actual game would be, and one should not use the Heaven Benchmark result to gauge actual in-game performance for future DirextX11 titles.

Overall, the Sapphire HD 5670 is a great graphics card, and those who are on a budget and want DirectX11 compatibility and playable frame rates in current games would do well to consider it. NAG

Neo Sibeko





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ATX power Power tupe











CD-ROM rack can be placed either on right or left









ATE LAST YEAR, MANY enthusiasts and gamers alike were upset with the renaming of current graphics cards by NVIDIA. Many claimed that this was misleading to the end user, and in some ways was dishonest, as NVIDIA was offering the exact same graphics card as they were before, but under a different name, and charging accordingly for it.

One such graphics card was the GeForce GT 240, which many felt did not deserve to be part of the 200 series, based on its performance and lack of any significant changes from the previous GeForce 9 series core it was based on

This, however, is a sentiment that is unfounded, at least as far as the GT 240 is concerned. This is because the part offers similar performance to the outgoing 9600GT, however it's now targeted at a different price point (mainly the sub \$100 price point), and, as such, it is a new product in that segment.

More than the pricing changes, the GT 240 is actually a different core than any other previous GPU it may be based on. One of the most significant changes in the core is the DirectX10.1 compatibility. This change to support the newer Shader Model 4.1 and Direct Compute 4.1 makes this one of the few graphics cards from NVIDIA that supports the API.

As usual though, such a feature is a check box capability as it doesn't mean anything in the slightest. Very

few games ever took advantage of the updated specification, and now with DirectX11 here, DirextX10.1 support is

The important aspects of the GT 215 core are all concerned with performance. It's built on the TSMC 40nm process and packs about 137 million gates, making it the same size as the GeForceFX 5900 of 2003 in gate count. However, physically it is significantly smaller and as usual with node advancements, the cost to manufacture decreases significantly over the previous 65 and 55nm parts.

Being a budget card does not mean that it's not capable of modern games. In fact, because of ZOTAC's tuning, the GT 240 512MB AMP! Edition outperforms the competition's HD5670. The card is clocked at 600MHz instead of the default 550MHz. The memory speed has also been boosted to 1GHz GDDR5 instead of the typical 850MHz on the reference card. ZOTAC has also outfitted the card with a better GPU cooler which allows the card to handle the higher clock speeds. Surprisingly, the outfitted cooler is no louder than the reference cooler, and, in truth, it's quieter while delivering better cooling performance. With the overclocking work of ZOTAC, it means stream processors) are operating at an increased frequency of 1.46GHz. Since there are 96 such processors in the GT 215 core, this particular ZOTAC

GeForce GT 240 512MB AMP! Edition card delivers better performance than other competing cards such as the ATI HD5670 (reviewed in this issue as well).

Overall, the GT 215 core delivers better performance than the older GeForce 9600GT, however to keep the gate count size small and simplify the entire design, NVIDIA has gone with only eight render outputs and a 128-bit memory bus. The G94 had 16 render outputs and a 256-bit memory bus, and, in some situations, it is still faster than the GT 215. This is limited to the older titles though which place more emphasis on fill-rate than mathematical/shader processing capabilities.

If you're looking for a relatively affordable graphics card, but are not convinced about the relevance of DirextX11 in budget cards, the ZOTAC GeForce GT 240 512MB AMP! Edition card may be for you.

Neo Sibeko





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# **ZOTAC MAG HD-ND01**

THE ZOTAC MINI ALL-IN-ONE Giant (MAG) - easily the most misleading name in consumer IT history. So what the heck is

Well, it's a nettop. Everyone knows what a netbook is, but despite being around for some time, they're still fairly obscure. So basically, what a netbook is to a notebook, a nettop is to a desktop. A compact, light, unobtrusive little box designed for the "lighter" computing user as a convenient, low(ish)-cost and small-footprint alternative to a hulking, great tower PC.

The idea isn't new, although the extremely tiny size is still enchanting. Small form factor (SFF) boxes, however, have only appealed to a very specific market, unlike the netbook which just shouts at the gadget-freak in all of us. It is, after all, a mobile, so the lightness and compactness of the newer form factor really appeals. For a desktop, well, why not just buy a desktop? It's not like you have to carry it around all that much.

Nevertheless, the ZOTAC unit is quite intriguing. It sports one of Intel's latest Atom CPUs (330), 2GB of DDR2-800, a 160GB HDD, and an intriguing NVIDIA ION graphics system on a ZOTAC board/ chipset combo. Its spec sheet is lengthy for such a tyke - there's native HDMI, a

built-in card reader, 8-channel audio and both Gigabit LAN and 802.11n. This is all packed into a chassis which measures 186x189x38mm. So, it's not that much bigger than an optical drive for instance: basically take the length of a DVD-ROM drive and make it square.

To give you an idea of weight, it comes with a useful little, solidly-built plastic cover which allows it to stand up or lie down or affix to the back of your LCD. Adding the stand almost doubles the weight of the unit.

Problem 1: there is no optical drive, naturally. USB or eSATA drives work, as well as installation images booting off a USB stick. We rather popped the unit open and inserted a drive of our own, also a 160GB 2.5-inch, with everything needed already on the little platters. With Windows 7 installed, the MAG is a whole lot of machine. Not quite of the "all you'll ever need" variety as a gaming platform, but enough to be a handy addition to the LAN for occasional quests or a dedicated work machine with basic gaming power or even a youngster's startup system. Or a media centre of course, but there is the lack of an optical drive to consider here, and adding one permanently would ruin the elegance.

The Atom 330 is a dual-core chip, and

never gets too hot even during a rainy and hot Joburg summer. It is helped along by quite a mean cooling arrangement, which could get noisy, but only did briefly during testing, and it was under extreme benching circumstances on a seriously humid day. The Ion GPU is quite capable too – just that necessary step between a useless integrated GPU and a full mid-range card. Web reports reckon the chipset is faster than the competitive Intel platform too, and some have criticised the speed of the HDD, which unfortunately we didn't actually test with our installation method.

It isn't exactly low-cost, however. But it is a very good machine. NAG Russell Bennett



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It's got all the options you want, a killer contrast ratio, and a really shiny bezel.

# AOC 2236Vw LCD

HEN LCDS FIRST BECAME the defacto replacement for CRTs and were just gaining traction in the market, there were some gaming-specific challenges they faced which made us just, well, not like them. Even when the ghosting issues of LCD response times became well-known and the manufacturers first started pushing out 6ms, then 4ms LCDs, for the most part the problems persisted. Besides, they simply could not match the resolution of the CRT, so in spite of the pleasingly more brilliant colours displayed, we largely stuck to the older tech.

Now, alongside my old 19-inch CRT, I have this 22-inch AOC LCD set up, so let's see how far we've come.

First off, the size is tricky. Because of the always-peculiar method in which displays are measured, the 22-inch is in fact slightly smaller than the 19. Vertically, at least. Horizontally of course, being a widescreen, it does offer substantially more usable desktop area and a nicer viewing experience watching movies, of course

Anyway, this AOC 2236Vw immediately reminds me of the difference in colour reproduction. The CRT looks very grey in comparison, the LCD positively vibrant. The delta is quite astonishing looking at them side by side. This AOC doesn't boast the highest contrast ratio ever either, but still a mostly-blind monkey would spot the difference at 50 paces, and undoubtedly, go for the bright yellow banana in the newer display!

Sure, there's still a resolution problem. But then the 1920x1080 (full 1080p) of the LCD is also more than sufficient for anything bar extreme multi-GPU testing, as long as the game supports 16:9, which most modern ones do. The images are displayed with crystal clarity and look sharper on the AOC, even if there are fewer pixels overall.

As for refresh rate, this display claims 5ms. Although the original 4ms LCDs didn't impress me much, this one doesn't ghost except in all but the fastest-moving of games, and they're old-hat these days anyway, with most modern titles preferring jaw-dropping beauty over raw adrenaline-pumping pace anyway. But unless you're really looking, even a quick Q3 bot-match is perfect; you have to be as pedantic as a long-time reviewer to really spot the problem.

It accepts input both via native DVI and an old-school VGA cable, and aesthetically is just streets ahead of the old tech, with its piano-black bezel and slimline footprint incomparably superior. There's a good range of options to choose from as well, if you delve into the settings menus. Perhaps some higher-end models have more but everything you'd want is in there. There's even a USB slot.

although this is really just an extension, taking up one USB slot on your PC in exchange.

Even the viewing angle is no longer much of an issue, and allows several people sitting watching a movie to see from a wide variety of spots in the room. And it's a low-voltage device, so will even show up as a small reduction on your increasingly ridiculous electricity bill.

The absolute kicker for me though, is the price. This is actually a budget LCD, and you'll pick one up for around R1,500.

In short, it is a great product. Good features, excellent performance, brilliant price. I'll take two thanks and resign the CRT to the test bench for those ridiculously high-end graphics card tests. NAG

Russell Bennett





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ICTURE THIS: YOU'VE JUST arrived home

with your brand-new, ultra-shiny NVIDIA ION-powered netbook. You've heard all about its gaming potential and the idea of COD on the move sounds fantastic, especially if you can still get the portability and battery life that you'd expect from a netbook. You tear open the box in excitement, pop in the battery and go scrounging through your pile of game boxes in search of MW2 while you wait for it to boot up. With the game located and the netbook waiting patiently, you pop the game disc out of its protective packaging and... how do you actually get the game onto your fancy new netbook? You could try to rip an ISO of it using your PC, and load it up with Daemon tools or the like, but many modern games have really tough copy protection that won't be happy with your attempts to solve this catastrophe. The fact is if you have a netbook capable of running anything that requires a disc-based installation you need an external optical drive. And buying one of those bulky, 5.25-inch ACpowered drives kind of ruins the point of portability. That's where the Freecom Mobile DVD RW LS comes in.

It's light, it's compact, and it can run purely off USB power for the majority of its functions. Installation is a breeze: Any Windows-based OS from XP

(there's no mention of Mac support) and up will install it without the need for additional drivers (which are supplied) or a reboot. On the included disc you also receive a copy of Roxio Creator XE, the Lightscribe software and an in-depth digital manual. The Roxio package contains a number of applications for burning, DVD playback, ripping (both digitally and through an external device such as a camera), creating your own media discs and a full backup facility called BackOnTrack, which features scheduled backups and one-click restoration should your computer suffer data loss. All of this is accessed through the easy-to-use Creator XE application.

In terms of performance, the drive managed to match the read speeds of many factory-pressed discs that we tested, but fell behind with the homeburned discs obviously designed for higher-speed use. The manufacturers recommend that you have the AC power attached during burning if your USB port can't offer enough juice. There is, thankfully, a Y-cable included that allows you to draw extra power from a second port should you find yourself short a couple of volts. During our tests, our attempts using both the double USB power and external adaptor yielded

CD-R write speeds of up to 24x (the maximum we could select), but average write speeds hovered around the 16x mark. While such speeds are acceptable given the convenience of this device, you may find yourself getting a little frustrated if you're performing large backups on a regular basis.

Despite slightly disappointing write speeds, there are few other faults to be found with this device. DVD playback was effortless, and it even has support for Lightscribe burning. This is a great device for anyone looking to add an optical drive to a netbook, or even quickly upgrade any PC if you're not in the mood for fiddling with internal components. NAG

**Geoff Burrows** 





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# The stars my destination

HAVE A DIRTY, DIRTY secret [nobody wants to hear about your mouldy potato fetish, Ed] – I thought Dragon Age: Origins was a bit rubbish. Actually, quite a lot rubbish. Fact: as a genre, fantasy is pretty much just a big heap of rotting clichés glued together with a few bits of reanimated corpses, magic swords, and ancient prophecies about some chosen guy [YOU!] who will singlehandedly deliver the entire planet from some egregious infamy that invariably comprises nothing much more than a conveniently diminished race of twisted abominations that speak with prominent sibilants, have no sensible agenda of their own, and used to be elves. Just about any fantasy RPG\* can be summarised as:

"The kingdom of (x), previously beset by the great and terrible evil of (y), is once again beset by the very same great and terrible evil due to some wildly unlikely oversight and/or BAD WIZARD; there's also a talking dragon."

Of course, *Dragon Age* bragged about being "dark fantasy", but apparently that was just a word the marketing people stole from *Beowulf* to fool other people into thinking the game was sophisticated or something. Tellingly, however, they forgot to call the game something without the word "dragon" in it.

BioWare needs to chuck this vapid, pointless fantasy business altogether, because *Mass Effect* is obviously superior in every way imaginable. Proof:

### ${\bf Space ships\ are\ better\ than\ ponies}$

In fantasy RPGs, you have to slog it everywhere on foot. At most, you might have a pony, and the only people who actually like ponies are giddy 6-year old

girls who don't have Lego or *Star Wars* stuff to play with. In *Mass Effect*, you get your own spaceship. Pony or spaceship? Spaceship.

### Biotics are better than magic spells

Because biotics are actually theoretically possible, and because the word "biotics" sounds important and dangerous and cool. Magic makes me think of glitter and paedophiles at children's birthday parties.

### Guns are better than bows and arrows

Which would you rather have in a desperate combat scenario: an SMG that fires off 200 mass accelerated cryo slugs every second, or a bow and arrow? Only one of those options is going to make actual enemies actually dead, and it's not the bow and arrows.

### Commander Shepard is better than some stupid Dale Elf mage

Commander Shepard has his own spaceship, biotics, and guns. He's also respected all over the charted and uncharted universe as a fully accredited badass, and he can shoot his way through entire space stations without local security complaining or anyone filing for property damage. Meanwhile, everybody hates elves.

### There are no dragons in $\it Mass\, Effect$

There's no such thing as dragons, anyway – they're just lizards that someone's resized in Photoshop. And lizards are repulsive.

 ${\color{blue}*} \ {\color{blue}\texttt{Except}} \ {\color{blue}\textit{Planescape Torment}}, obviously. \ {\color{blue}\textit{Planescape Torment}} \ {\color{blue}\texttt{is}} \ {\color{blue}\texttt{totally}} \ {\color{blue}\texttt{awesome}}.$ 





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